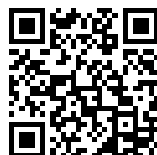
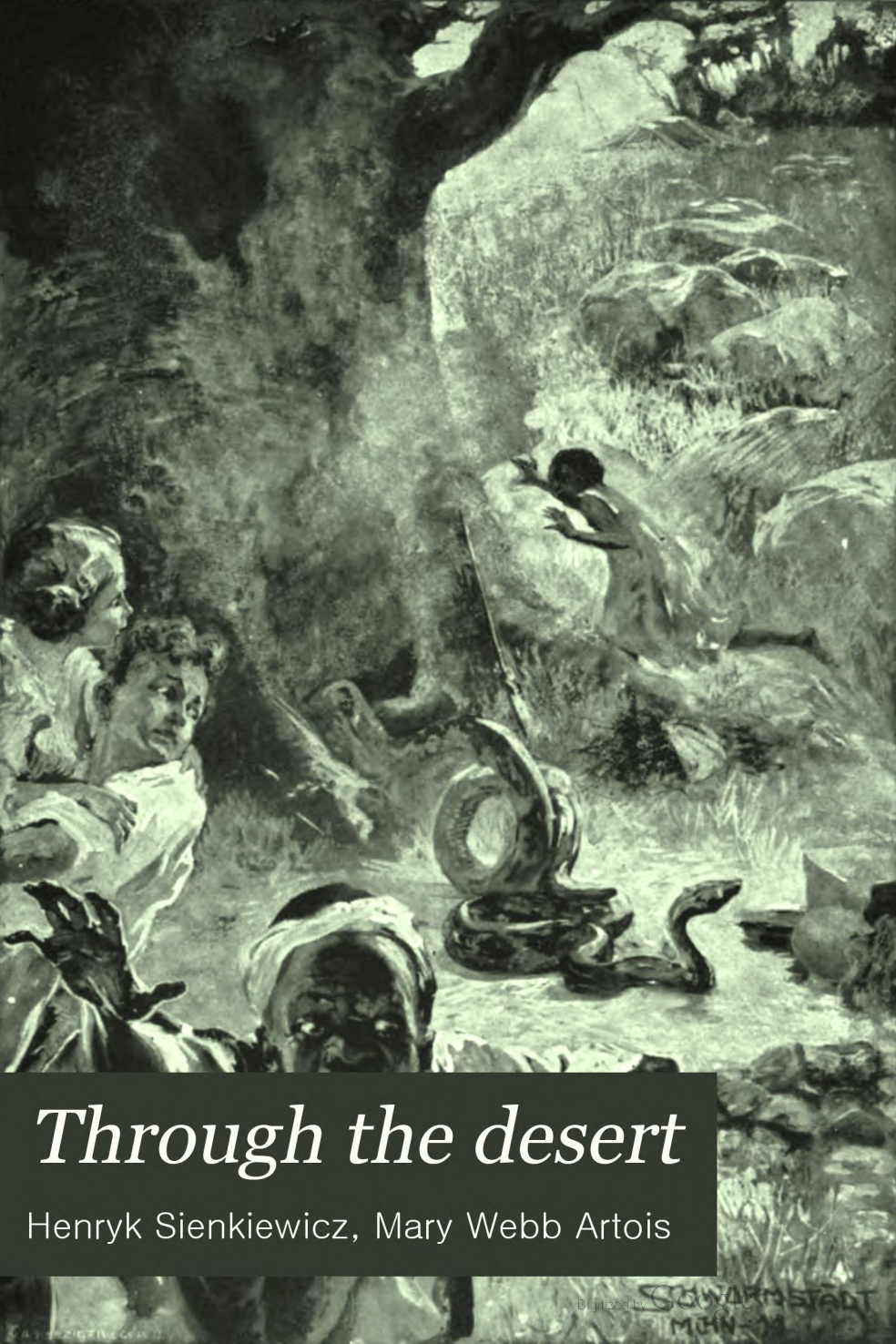

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

GoogleTM books

<http://books.google.com>





Through the desert

Henryk Sienkiewicz, Mary Webb Artois



EX LIBRIS



JUDD GREENMAN

THROUGH THE DESERT



Nell and Stasch

THROUGH THE DESERT

By
HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ



NEW YORK, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO
BENZIGER BROTHERS
PUBLISHERS OF BENZIGER'S MAGAZINE
1912

**COPYRIGHT, 1912, BY BENZIGER BROTHERS
IN THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN**

Judd and Lillian Greenman
August 11, 1902.
from mother.

PG
7158
S4
W212

THROUGH THE DESERT

PART I

CHAPTER I

"**N**ELL, do you know," said Stasch Tarkowski to his friend, an English girl, "that yesterday the Sabties (policemen) arrested the wife and children of Overseer Smain—the same Fatima who often visited our fathers' offices?"

Little Nell, as pretty as a picture, looked up at Stasch (Stanislaus) with her greenish eyes, and half astonished, half afraid, asked:

"Have they put them in prison?"

"No, but they would not allow them to travel to Sudan, and an officer has been stationed to watch them so as to prevent their taking a step outside of Port Said."

"Why?"

Stasch, who was now fourteen years of age, was much attached to his eight-year-old comrade. He regarded her merely as a child, and assuming a very superior air answered:

"When you are as old as I am you will know everything—what is taking place on the canal from Port Said to Suez, and all over Egypt."

"Have you heard anything about the Mahdi? I've heard that he is ugly and naughty."

6 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

The boy smiled condescendingly. "I don't know whether he is ugly or not. The Sudanese think he is handsome; but to call a man who has killed so many people 'naughty'—that is a word only a little girl, with short dresses reaching down to her knees, would use."

"Papa told me so, and papa knows best."

"He used that word in speaking to you because you would not have understood anything else. He would not have used it in speaking to me. The Mahdi is worse than a hundred crocodiles. Do you understand what I say? The word 'naughty' is a good word to use when talking to little children."

But when he saw the troubled look on the child's face he said: "Nell, you know that I don't want to vex you. The time is coming when you will be fourteen, too."

"Yes," she answered, with an anxious expression. "What if the Mahdi should take Port Said, and eat me?"

"The Mahdi is not a cannibal and therefore does not eat people; he murders them instead. Besides, he will never take Port Said; even if he did capture it, and were to try to kill you, he would have me to deal with."

This assertion he made in a snarling tone, which augured no good to the Mahdi, but it had the effect of apparently quieting Nell on the subject. "I know," she answered, "that you would protect me. But why won't they allow Fatima to leave Port Said?"

"Because Fatima is the Mahdi's cousin. Her husband told the Egyptian Government at Cairo that he would travel to Sudan, where the Mahdi was staying, for the purpose of freeing all the Europeans who had fallen into his hands."

"So Smain is good, then?"

"Listen! Our fathers, who knew Smain very well, had no confidence in him, and they warned Nubar Pasha not to trust him. But the government was willing to send Smain there, and he has been six months with the Mahdi. Still, not only did the captives not return, but, according to reports from Khartum, the Mahdists are treating them most cruelly; and Smain, after having received money from the government, has turned traitor. He commanded the artillery of the Mahdi in the dreadful battle in which General Hicks fell, and he taught the Mahdists to use cannon, of which these savages knew nothing before. But Smain is now making every effort to get his wife and children out of Egypt. Fatima, who knew beforehand what Smain was trying to do, is said to have attempted to leave Port Said secretly, and that is why the government has imprisoned her and her children."

"What does the government want with Fatima and her children?"

"The government intends to say to the Mahdi: 'If you return those of our people you

8 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

have taken prisoners, we will give up Fatima.' ” After this they stopped talking, for birds flying in the direction from Echtum om-Farag toward Lake Menzaleh attracted Stasch’s attention. They flew rather low down in the clear air, and many pelicans could be seen stretching out their necks and slowly flapping their tremendous wings. Stasch imitated their flight by raising his head very high, running along the dam, and waving his outstretched arms.

“Look! The flamingoes also are flying!” Nell suddenly exclaimed.

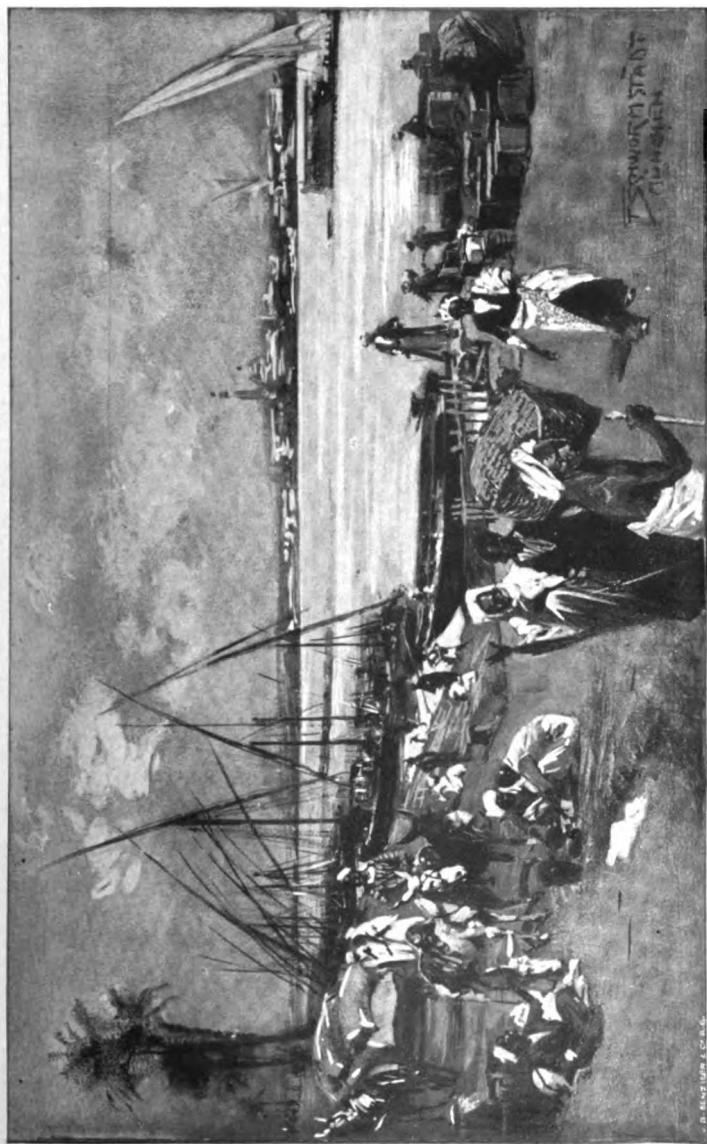
Stasch stopped a moment, for just behind the pelicans, but hovering a little higher in the air, might be seen two large objects, like red and rose-colored flowers.

“Toward evening they fly to their home on the small island,” said the boy. “Oh, if I only had a gun!”

“Why do you want to shoot them?”

“Women never understand such things, but let us go on; perhaps we shall see some more of them.”

With those words he took the little girl by the hand, and they went along the first canal path behind Port Said, followed by Dinah, a negress, who was formerly little Nell’s nurse. They went along the embankment that confines the waters of Lake Menzaleh, through which a pilot had just taken an English steamer.



The sun soon set below the lake, whose salt water began to glimmer like gold.

:

Evening was approaching. The sun was still rather high, but it soon set below the lake, whose salt water began to glimmer like gold and assume the shimmering hues of a peacock's plume. On the Arabian shore, as far as eye could see, stretched the gloomy, menacing, dead desert. Between the glassy and motionless sky and the shoreless, furrowed stretch of sand there was not a sign of any living creature. While the canal presented a scene of great commercial activity—boats gliding past, steamers whistling, and over the surface of Lake Menzaleh flocks of sea-gulls and wild ducks glistening in the moonlight—on the Arabian shore it was as desolate as a city of the dead. But the lower the sun sank, the redder the west became; even the sand-dunes were tinted with lilac color, resembling the heather found in the autumn woods of Poland.

Walking toward the landing, the children saw several more flamingoes, and their eyes fairly danced with joy. Then Dinah said that Nell must go home. In Egypt the days, which even in winter are very warm, are followed by cold nights, and as Nell's health required great care, Mr. Rawlison, her father, did not allow the child to remain near the water after sundown; so they returned to the Rawlison villa, at the extreme end of the town, near the canal. Mr. Tarkowski, the father of Stasch, had been invited to dine; he came in soon after, and then the whole company, including the French

10 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

woman, Mrs. Olivier, Nell's governess, sat down to dinner.

Mr. Rawlison, a director of the Suez Canal Company, and Vladislav Tarkowski, chief engineer of the same company, had been very intimate for many years. Both were widowers. Mrs. Tarkowski, a French lady, had died giving birth to Stasch thirteen years before. Nell's mother had died of consumption in Heluan when her little girl was three years old. The two widowers lived close by each other, and their business in Port Said brought them in daily contact. Their mutual sorrows also cemented their old friendship. Mr. Rawlison loved Stasch as though he had been his own son, and Mr. Tarkowski would have gone through fire and water for little Nell. After their day's work was done their greatest pleasure was to talk about the education and the future of their children. While they were conversing thus Mr. Rawlison would praise the capability, energy, and precocity of Stasch, and Mr. Tarkowski express himself enthusiastically about Nell's charm and her little angel face.

Both were correct in their views. Stasch was somewhat conceited and boastful, but quick in his studies, and the teachers of the English school in Port Said prophesied a great future for him. He had inherited aptitude and courage from his father, for Mr. Tarkowski possessed these qualities in a marked degree, and

to them he owed his present high position. He had taken an active part in the Polish revolution for eleven months, then, being wounded and taken prisoner, he was banished to Siberia, from which he escaped and fled to a foreign country.

Before joining the insurrectionists he was graduated as an engineer. A year after his escape he spent all his time studying hydraulics; then he obtained a position on the canal, and after several years, when his thorough knowledge, energy, and industry had become known, he was promoted to the position of chief engineer.

Stasch was born at Port Said, on the banks of the canal, was brought up there, and had now attained his fourteenth year. For this reason the engineers and his father's colleague called him "The Child of the Desert." Later, in his school life, at vacation time, he often accompanied his father and Mr. Rawlison when they went on short business trips from Port Said to Suez, which they were obliged to do in order to superintend the workmen on the dam and to direct the excavation of the canal bed. He knew all the engineers and the custom-house officers, as well as the workmen, the Arabs, and the negroes.

He went everywhere, even where no one would think of looking for him; he made long excursions on the embankments, rowed his small boat on Lake Menzaleh, and often wan-

12 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

dered far away. He would row across to the Arabian shore and catch a horse, or not finding one, he would take a camel, or even a donkey, to aid him in playing the fakir in the desert. In a word, as Mr. Tarkowski would say, he ferreted into everything, and every moment he had free from his studies he spent on the water. His father did not remonstrate with him, for he knew that rowing, riding, and outdoor life would make the boy more robust and develop his energies. Stasch was taller and stronger than most boys of his age. One glance at his eyes was enough to convince any one that he was more courageous than cowardly.

In his fourteenth year he was the best swimmer in Port Said, which is saying a great deal, for the Arabs and the negroes swim like fish. In shooting wild ducks and Egyptian geese with his small gun he had acquired a steady hand and a true eye.

His ambition was to shoot big game in Central Africa, and he listened eagerly to the tales told by the Sudanese working on the canal, who hunted wild beasts in their native country. This intermingling with the Sudanese gave him the advantage of learning their languages.

The Suez Canal had not only to be dug, but also to be constantly watched; otherwise the sand on either shore would fill it up within a year. Lesseps' great work demands continual vigilance and care, and therefore powerful machines and thousands of men under the

supervision of skilful engineers are still laboring daily, deepening its bed.

In excavating the canal twenty-five thousand workmen were employed, but now that it is completed and machinery is so much improved, fewer men are necessary. There are, however, a considerable number still employed, chiefly natives, including Nubians, Sudanese, Somalis, and negroes of different tribes living on the White and Blue Nile, over whom the Egyptian Government had ruled before the revolt of the Mahdi. Stasch lived on friendly terms with all of them, and, as is usually the case with the Poles, he had a great gift for languages; thus he had picked up many of their dialects without knowing when and where. Born in Egypt, he spoke Arabian like an Arab. From the natives of Zanzibar, who served as firemen on the engines, he had learned the language which is spoken throughout the greater part of Africa—the Ki-swahili dialect—and he could make himself understood by the negroes of the Dinka and Schilluk tribes, who inhabit the upper half of Fashoda, on the Nile. He also spoke English, French, and Polish fluently; his father, an ardent patriot, had taken great care that his boy should be familiar with his own tongue. Stasch also considered this the most beautiful of all languages, and he was successful in teaching it to little Nell. But he was never able to make her pronounce his name correctly. She would always say “Stes” instead of Stasch,

14 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

and this often caused a misunderstanding, which only lasted until the little girl's eyes filled with tears, then "Stes" would ask her forgiveness, and was usually very angry with himself. But he had a disagreeable habit of referring disdainfully to her eight years, and of contrasting his age and experience with her youth. He asserted that a boy who had completed his thirteenth year, even if he were not entirely grown up, was at least no longer a child, that he was capable of accomplishing all kinds of heroic exploits, especially if he had Polish and French blood in his veins, and that he ardently wished for an opportunity to do such deeds, especially in Nell's defense. Both children imagined all sorts of dangers, and Stasch always knew how to meet her difficulties. For instance, what he would do were a crocodile a dozen yards long, or a scorpion as large as a dog, to creep into the house through the window. Neither of them had the least idea that the terrible reality was soon to exceed their most fantastic conjectures.

CHAPTER II

IN THE meantime welcome news awaited them at home. Mr. Tarkowski and Mr. Rawlison, being experienced engineers, had been invited a few weeks before to inspect and report on the works of the whole canal system in the province of El-Fayoum, in the vicinity of

Medinet, on Lake Karoon, as well as along the Yoosuf and the Nile rivers. They were going to remain there nearly a month, and had therefore procured leave of absence from their own company. As Christmas was near, they both decided that they would not leave the children, and that Stasch and Nell should accompany them to Medinet. When the children heard the news they jumped up and down with joy. Until now they had only known about the cities bordering on the canal, such as Ismailia and Suez, and, on the other side of the lake, Alexandria and Cairo, from which they had visited the great Pyramids and the Sphinx. But these were short excursions, whereas the expedition to Medinet-el-Fayoum was a whole day's journey by train along the Nile to the south, and then from El-Wasta to the west toward the Libyan desert. Stasch knew Medinet from the description given by the younger engineers and travelers, who went there to hunt all kinds of waterfowl, as well as wolves and hyenas in the desert. He knew that the town was a large isolated oasis on the left bank of the Nile, but that it was independent of the river's overflow, having a water system of its own, formed by Lake Karoon and the Bahr-Yoosuf, and many small canals. Every one who had seen the oasis said that although this strip of land belongs to Egypt, it is separated from it by the desert, and seems to be an isolated spot. Only the river Yoosuf, like a thin blue ribbon, con-

16 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

nects this district with the Nile valley. The great abundance of water, the fertility of the land, and the luxuriant vegetation make it an earthly paradise, and the extensive ruins of the ancient city of Crocodilopolis attract hundreds of curious travelers. Stasch was especially charmed with the shores of Lake Karoon, with its flocks of birds, and by the wolf-hunting expeditions in the desert hills of Jebel-el-Sedment.

Stasch's vacation would not begin until a few days later, but as the inspection of the works on the canal was pressing, the fathers had no time to lose; so it was decided that they were to leave at once, and that the children, together with Mrs. Olivier, should follow them a week later. Nell and Stasch wanted to start at once, but Stasch did not venture to coax to go with them. For this reason they began to study and to inform themselves about everything concerning the journey, and it was with great joy that they learned they would not have to live in uncomfortable hotels kept by Greeks, but in tents placed at their disposal by Messrs. Cook & Co., traveling agents. For travelers from Cairo to Medinet, and also for people who intend staying there for any length of time, the company supplies tents, servants, cooks, provisions, horses, camels, donkeys, and guides, so as to relieve the traveler of all care. This is indeed an expensive way of traveling, but Mr. Tarkowski and Mr. Rawlison were

not obliged to think of this, because all expenses were paid by the Egyptian Government, which had asked them, as experts, to inspect and report on the canal works.

Nell, whose greatest pleasure was riding a camel, made her father promise to get her one, on which she, in company with Mrs. Olivier or Dinah, and sometimes Stasch, might go along with the excursions to the borders of the desert and to Lake Karoon. Mr. Tarkowski promised Stasch that some time he would allow him to hunt wolves by night, and if he received a good report at school he would get him a genuine English shotgun and an entire hunting outfit. As Stasch was sure of having a good report, he immediately imagined himself the possessor of the gun, and resolved to accomplish difficult and wonderful and unheard-of deeds.

The happy children conversed about these things and made plans during the entire dinner. Mrs. Olivier was not at all enthusiastic about the coming journey, for she felt no desire to leave the comfortable villa in Port Said. At the very thought of living in tents, and especially at the prospect of taking excursions on camels, she began to be frightened. She had made several attempts to take similar rides—such as Europeans living in Egypt usually take—but it had always ended disastrously. Once the camel had stood up too

soon, and as she had not settled herself in the saddle she slid from his back to the ground. Another time a dromedary, which is not accustomed to light burdens, shook her up so that she did not recover for two days. Nell, on the other hand, after two or three rides that her father had allowed her to take, declared that there was nothing in the world more delightful. But Mrs. Olivier had nothing but unpleasant memories of her rides. She said that it was all right for Arabs, or for such little crabs as Nell, who felt the shaking no more than a fly that had alighted on the camel's hump; but for older people, the serious and rather heavy people who are sure to be seasick, it was a very different matter.

But she also had other reasons to be alarmed when she thought of Medinet-el-Fayoum. In Port Said, as well as in Alexandria, Cairo, and in fact throughout Egypt, people talked of nothing else but the revolt of the Mahdi and of the cruel deeds of the Dervishes. Although Mrs. Olivier did not exactly know where Medinet was, she felt uneasy lest it might be in too close proximity to the Mahdists, and at last she asked Mr. Rawlison.

But he only smiled and said:

"The Mahdi is at present besieging Khartum, which is defended by General Gordon. Do you know how far it is from Medinet to Khartum?"

"I have not the least idea."

"About as far as from here to Sicily," replied Mr. Tarkowski.

"Almost," corrected Stasch. "Khartum lies at the junction of the White Nile and the Blue Nile. Much of Egypt and the whole length of Abyssinia separate us from it."

He was on the point of adding that even if Medinet lay nearer the districts most affected by the insurrection, he would always be there with his rifle, but when he remembered that he had been repeatedly reproved by his father for similar bragging he was silent.

The two fathers began conversing about the Mahdi and the insurrection, for this was the most important news concerning Egypt. The news from Khartum was not encouraging. The savage tribes had now besieged the town for nearly a month and a half. The English and Egyptian government officials were slow to act; the relief army had scarcely started; and everybody thought that, notwithstanding Gordon's fame, heroism, and ability, this important town would fall into the hands of the barbarians. Mr. Tarkowski, who suspected that England would be only too glad if the Mahdi were to conquer southern Egypt, so that they might recapture it from the Mahdi and convert this enormous tract into an English settlement, was of the same opinion. But he did not say this to Mr. Rawlison for fear of wounding his patriotic feelings.

When the dinner was nearly finished, Stasch

20 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

inquired why the Egyptian Government had annexed all the land south of Nubia—Kordofan, Darfur, and Sudan as far as the Albert-Nyanza, and why it had robbed the inhabitants of their liberty. Mr. Rawlison determined to explain this to him, because every move by the Egyptian Government was made at the command of England, which had extended her protectorate over Egypt and ruled it as she pleased.

"The Egyptian Government has deprived no one of his liberty," said he, "but instead has returned it to hundreds, thousands, and perhaps millions. A short time ago there were no independent towns in Kordofan, Darfur, and Sudan, except here and there where some small potentate asserted his rights to several districts and appropriated them by force, against the will of the inhabitants. But on the whole they were inhabited by independent tribes of Arabo-Negroes; that is to say, by people having the blood of both these races in their veins. These tribes were perpetually fighting with one another. They would attack one another, steal horses, cattle, and especially slaves. At the same time many atrocious deeds were committed, but the most desperate of these men were those who hunted for ivory and for slaves. They formed, as it were, a class apart, and to this class nearly all the chiefs of the tribes and the prosperous merchants belonged. These men led armed reconnoitering

parties into the interior of Africa, and stole ivory tusks and took thousands of people—men, women, and children—captive. They also destroyed villages, settlements, and fields, and spilled rivers of blood; they mercilessly massacred every one who made any show of resistance; so much so that the southern part of Sudan, Darfur, and Kordofan, and also the districts of the upper Nile as far as the lakes, were almost depopulated in places. But the Arabs advanced still farther, so that nearly the whole of central Africa was converted into a vale of tears and blood. Therefore England, which, as you know, pursues all slave dealers in every part of the world, agreed that the Egyptian Government should occupy Kordofan, Darfur, and Sudan, for that was the only way to force these thieves to stop their gruesome slave-trading. The unhappy negroes breathed freely once more, and, as they were no longer afraid of being robbed and attacked, they settled down to some degree of law and order. Apparently this state of affairs did not please the traders, so when Mohammed Achmed—now called the Mahdi—appeared in their midst, under the pretext that Mohammedanism in Egypt was on the decline, and proclaimed the Holy War, all the men of one accord took up arms, and thus the terrible war began, in which, until now, the Egyptians have fared very badly. The Mahdi has beaten the Egyptian troops in every battle, and has taken

22 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

possession of Kordofan, Darfur, and Sudan; his tribes are now besieging Khartum and advancing as far north as the borders of Nubia."

"And is it possible that they can reach Egypt?" asked Stasch.

"No," answered Mr. Rawlison. "The Mahdi, it is true, has proclaimed that he will conquer the whole world, but he is a barbarian and does not know what he is talking about. He can not conquer Egypt, for England will not permit it."

"But suppose the Egyptian army be worsted?"

"Then the English troops, which are invincible, will appear on the scene."

"And why did England permit the Mahdi to take possession of so many districts?"

"How do you know that she permitted him?" answered Mr. Rawlison. "England never acts in haste, for she is a great nation."

The conversation was now interrupted by the negro servant, who announced that Fatima Smain was there and that she earnestly begged an audience. The women of the Orient practically confine their energies to household matters, and rarely leave the harem. Only the poorer ones go to market or work in the fields like the wives of the fellahs (Egyptian peasants), and they veil their faces. In Sudan, where Fatima came from, this was not the custom, and although she had been to Mr.

Rawlison's office before, her appearance in a private house, and especially at this late hour, seemed rather peculiar.

"We shall learn something new about Smain," said Mr. Tarkowski.

"Yes," answered Mr. Rawlison, at the same time motioning the servant to usher in Fatima.

In a few seconds there appeared a tall, young Sudanese woman; her dark, beautiful face, with its wild, tragic, and prophetic eyes, was unveiled. On entering she immediately fell on her face, and when Mr. Rawlison ordered her to arise she assumed a kneeling position.

"Sidi," she began, "may Allah bless you, your heirs, your house, and your flocks."

"What do you want?" asked the engineer.

"Pity, deliverance, and help in time of trouble. Oh, sir, I am imprisoned in Port Said, and destruction hovers over me and my children!"

"You say you are imprisoned, and yet you are able to come here even at night."

"The Sabties, who guard my house day and night, led me here, and I'm sure they have been ordered to cut off our heads very soon."

"Talk like a sensible woman," answered Mr. Rawlison, frowning. "You are not in Sudan, but in Egypt, where no one is killed without a judicial sentence, and so you can rest assured that not a hair of your head or of your children's will be touched."

However, she besought him once more to intercede for her with the Egyptian Government, and obtain permission for her to travel to meet Smain. "The English are as great as you, sir," she said; "they are able to accomplish anything. The government in Cairo thinks that Smain is guilty of treason, but that is not true. Yesterday I talked with Arabian merchants, who came from Suakim, after having bought rubber and ivory in Sudan, and they told me that Smain lies ill in El-Fasher and bids me and the children come to him, so that he may bless us."

"Fatima, you have invented this tale," interrupted Mr. Rawlison.

She now began to protest by Allah that she was telling the truth, and then she said that were Smain to recover he would certainly buy the freedom of all the Christian prisoners, and if he were to die then she—as a relative of the leader of the Dervishes—would easily gain admission to him, and be able to obtain anything she asked. If only she might travel to join her husband, for her heart bled longing to see him! What had she, unhappy woman, done against the government or the Khedive? She asked if it were her fault, and if she could have prevented her misfortune in being the relative of the Dervish, Mohammed Achmed.

Fatima did not dare, before Englishmen, to call her relative "the Mahdi," as that name means "Saviour of the World"; and she knew



“Her dark, beautiful face, with its wild, prophetic eyes, was unveiled. When Mr. Rawlison ordered her to arise she assumed a kneeling position.”—PAGE 23.

that the Egyptian Government looked upon him as a rebel and a schemer. Continually bowing and calling on heaven to witness her innocence and her misfortune, she began to weep piteously, just as women of the Orient are accustomed to do on the death of their husbands or sons. Then she threw herself on her face on the ground, or, speaking more correctly, on the carpet which covered the inlaid floor, and remained silent.

Nell, who had felt somewhat sleepy toward the end of dinner, was now wide awake, and, as she had a kind heart, she took her father's hand, and kissing it over and over again, begged him to say a word in Fatima's behalf.

"Won't you help her, papa? Help her!"

And Fatima, who seemed to understand English, said between her sobs, without raising her head from the carpet:

"May Allah bless you, you little flower of paradise, Omaj's delight! Little star without blemish!"

Although Stasch in his heart of hearts was very angry with the Mahdists, he was touched by Fatima's request and by her sorrow. Besides, Nell had spoken for her, and he always ended by doing what she wanted, and so he said in an undertone, but still loud enough for all to hear:

"If I were the government, I would allow Fatima to leave."

"But as you are not the government," answered Mr. Tarkowski, "you had better not interfere in things that don't concern you."

Mr. Rawlison also had a compassionate heart, and he felt much sympathy for Fatima, but various things she had said seemed to him to be downright lies. As he practically did business daily in connection with the custom-house in Ismailia, he knew very well that no cargoes of rubber or ivory had passed through the canal lately. The trade in these goods had almost ceased. Besides, he knew that Arabian merchants could not return from the town El-Fasher, in Sudan, for from the beginning of the war the Mahdists absolutely refused to let merchants pass, and those they caught they robbed and took prisoners. Besides, it was almost certain that the tale of Smain's illness was a lie.

But as Nell continued to look beseechingly at her father, the latter, not wishing to sadden the girl, said to Fatima:

"Fatima, I have, as you requested, written to the government, but have received no answer as yet. And now listen. To-morrow we are going with the Mehendis (engineers) to Medinet-el-Fayoum. On the way we shall remain a day in Cairo, for the Khedive wishes to speak to us and give us orders about things concerning the canal, which is being directed from Bahr-Yoosuf. During the conversation I will try to tell him your position and gain his

good will for you; but I can do no more, and I can not promise anything."

Fatima arose, and stretching out both hands in thanks, she cried out:

"And so I'm saved!"

"No, Fatima," replied Mr. Rawlison, "do not speak of deliverance, for I have already told you that neither you nor your children are threatened with death. But whether or not the Khedive will permit you to depart I can not tell, for Smain is not ill, but a traitor, who, after having taken with him the government's money, has not the least idea of redeeming the prisoners taken by Mohammed Achmed."

"Sir, Smain is innocent, and he is in El-Fasher," repeated Fatima; "and even if he had been unfaithful to the government, I swear to you, my benefactor, that if I am permitted to leave I shall plead with Mohammed until I have succeeded in making him release your prisoners."

"Very well; I promise you once more that I will intercede for you with the Khedive."

Fatima began to bow very low.

"Sidi, I thank you. You are not only powerful, but just. And now I beg you to let us serve you as slaves."

"In Egypt there are no slaves," answered Mr. Rawlison with a smile. "I have servants enough, and besides, I would not be able to give you a position as servant, for, as I have already told you, we are going to Medinet, and we may stay there till the feast of Ramadan."

28 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Sir, I know it, for the overseer Chadigi told me; and when I heard it I not only came to beg you for help, but also to tell you that two men of my tribe (the Dangali), Idris and Gebhr, are camel-drivers in Medinet, and that as soon as you reach there they will place themselves and their camels at your disposal."

"Good, good!" answered the director; "but the Cook Company is attending to all these details for us."

Kissing the hands of the two gentlemen and the children, Fatima departed, blessing Nell as she went. The two engineers were silent for a while and then Mr. Rawlison said:

"Poor woman! She tells lies such as no one outside of the Orient would dream of. Even in her shower of thanks a false note is heard."

"Certainly," answered Mr. Tarkowski. "But it is also true that, whether Smain be a traitor or not, the government has no right to detain her in Egypt, for she is not responsible for her husband's acts."

"The government at this time does not permit any Sudanese to travel to Suakim and Nubia without permission, and this does not apply to Fatima only. There are many Sudanese in Egypt; they came here to make money, and among them are a certain number belonging to the Dangali tribe, from which the Mahdi comes. For instance, to it belong not only Fatima, but Chadigi and those two camel-

drivers in Medinet. The Mahdists say the Egyptians are Turks, and are at war with them, and among the Arabs settled here are numerous followers of the Mahdi, who would like to go over to his side if they dared. They include all fanatics, all followers of Arabi Pasha, and many of the poorer classes. They are at outs with the government for having submitted to English influence, and pretend their religion suffers in consequence. Heaven knows how many have already fled by way of the desert, and by so doing have avoided the usual water route to Suakim, and as the government found out that Fatima had attempted to escape also, it ordered her to be placed under guard. Only by exchanging her and her children—as they are related to the Mahdi—for our men captured by them may we hope to get them back.”

“Do the lower classes in Egypt really sympathize with the Mahdi?”

“The Mahdi has followers even among our soldiers, and perhaps that is the reason they fight so badly.”

“But how can the Sudanese escape by way of the desert? It is thousands of miles long.”

“And yet slaves have been brought into Egypt that way.”

“I do not believe that Fatima’s children could stand a journey like that.”

“But she will make it shorter by crossing over to Suakim.”

80 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"All the same, she is a poor woman."

Thus the conversation ended.

And twelve hours later, after the "poor woman" had carefully locked herself in her house with the son of the overseer Chadigi, with raised eyebrows and a lowering glance in her lovely eyes, she whispered:

"Chamis, son of Chadigi, take this money; start to-day for Medinet, and give Idris this writing, which, at my request, the holy Dervish Ballali wrote to him. The children of these Mehendisi are good (i.e., good material to be used to further our ends)—there is no other way—if I can not gain permission to travel. I know that you will not betray me. . . . Remember that you and your father belong to the Dangali tribe, the same tribe to which the Mahdi belongs."

CHAPTER III

ON THE following day the two engineers left for Cairo to visit the English residents, and also to have an audience with the viceroy. Stasch calculated that this might take two days; he was right, for on the evening of the third day he received the following telegram, sent from Medinet by his father: "The tents are ready. Start when your holidays begin. Send word to Fatima by Chadigi that we were unable to do anything for her." Mrs. Olivier

received a similar telegram, and so she, assisted by Dinah, began at once to prepare for the journey. The children were overjoyed to see the packing going on, but suddenly something occurred that upset all their plans and came near preventing their departure. For during the first day of Stasch's winter vacation, on the evening of which they had planned to make their departure, Mrs. Olivier, when taking her afternoon nap in the garden, was bitten by a scorpion, and although the bite of this poisonous creature is not so dangerous in Egypt, in this case it might prove very serious. The scorpion had crept over the back of a canvas chair and bitten her in the neck just as she had mashed it with her head; and as she had formerly suffered from erysipelas, it was feared that she might have a relapse. A doctor was immediately summoned, but as he was busy elsewhere, he did not arrive for two hours. By this time her neck and even her face were swollen, and she had a fever accompanied by the usual symptoms of poison. The doctor explained that under these circumstances she must not dream of going, and he ordered her to bed; and so it seemed as though the children would have to spend their Christmas at home. But to Nell's credit be it said, she thought more—especially at first—about the sufferings of her governess than the pleasures she would miss by not going to Medinet. But when she realized that she could not see her father again

82 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

for several weeks she wept in secret. Stasch did not take the matter so philosophically, and so he sent a telegram followed by a letter asking what was to be done. Mr. Rawlison, after having communicated with the doctor and learning from him that there was no immediate danger and that he had only forbidden Mrs. Olivier to leave Port Said because he feared the erysipelas might set in again, first arranged for her to have every care and comfort and then gave the children permission to start on the journey with Dinah. But as Dinah, notwithstanding her boundless affection for Nell, was scarcely competent to take charge of the journey and make arrangements for them in the hotel, Stasch was to be guide and cashier. One can readily imagine how proud he was of this rôle, and with what lordly pride he assured Nell that not a hair of her head would be touched, as if the road to Cairo and Medinet presented no difficulties or dangers.

As everything was now ready, the children left that very day, traveling by the canal to Ismailia, and from there by train to Cairo, where they were to spend the night and be ready to go on to Medinet the following day. When they left Ismailia they saw Timsah Lake, which Stasch had seen before; for Mr. Tarkowski, who was a very enthusiastic hunter in his leisure hours, sometimes took him along to shoot water-birds. Then the road fol-

lowed the Wadi Tumilat, close by the fresh-water canal which connects the Nile with Ismailia and Suez. This canal was dug before the Suez Canal; if it had not been, the workmen employed in Lesseps' great undertaking would not have had a drop of water to drink. The digging of this canal had another good result: the stretch of land, which had been a barren waste before, now blossomed once more when the wide and rapid stream of fresh water flowed through it. From the car windows the children saw a large belt of vegetation on the left side, consisting of meadows on which horses, camels, and sheep were grazing, and plowed fields, Turkish wheat, millet, alfa, and other species of grain and field plants. On the bank of the canal could be seen all kinds of wells, above which were large wheels fitted up with pails or ordinary cranes that drew up the water, which the fellahs assiduously spread over the beds or carried away in barrels on little wagons drawn by buffaloes. Over the sprouting grain-seeds hovered doves and sometimes flocks of quail. On the edges of the canal storks and cranes walked gravely up and down. In the distance, over the clay huts of the fellahs, towered crowns of date-palms that looked like large feather dusters.

On the other hand, north of the railway lay a wilderness, but it did not resemble the one on the other side of the Suez Canal. That looked like the flat sandy bed of a dried-up sea, while

84 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

here the sand was more yellow, and was piled up into large hillocks covered with scanty vegetation. Between these hillocks, which in places attained a great height, lay broad valleys, through which now and then caravans were seen passing.

From the car windows the children saw loaded camels walking single file in a long line. In front of each camel strode an Arab in black coat and white turban. Little Nell remembered the pictures she had seen in the Bible at home, which represented the Israelites and described how they journeyed to Egypt in the time of Joseph. They seemed just like these men. Unfortunately, she could not get a very good look at the caravans, because two English officers sat near the windows, which obstructed her view.

She had no sooner told Stasch of this than, turning to the officers, very seriously, and touching his hat, he said:

"Gentlemen, would you mind making room for this little lady, who would like to look at the camels?"

The two officers listened with all due seriousness, and one of them not only made room for the curious "little lady," but lifted her up and put her on the seat next the window.

Stasch immediately began to lecture.

"That is the old district of Gessen," said Stasch, "that Pharaoh gave Joseph for his brethren, the Israelites. Once, in fact very

long ago, there was a fresh-water canal here, so that this new one is only the old one rebuilt. Later it was destroyed and the country became a desert. Now the ground is becoming fertile again."

"How does the gentleman know this?" asked one of the officers.

"Nowadays people know these things," replied Stasch; "and besides, Professor Sterling lectured to us long ago on Wadi Tumilat."

Although Stasch spoke English very fluently, he had a rather peculiar accent; this attracted the attention of the second officer, who asked:

"Is not the young gentleman an Englishman?"

"This little lady is Miss Nell, whom her father has placed in my care during the journey. I am not an Englishman, but a Pole, and a son of one of the engineers of the canal."

The officer smiled at this answer, which the boy gave disjointedly, and said:

"I esteem the Poles very highly. I belong to a regiment of cavalry that in Napoleon's day fought side by side with the Polish Uhlans in several battles, the memory of which, even to the present day, is enshrined in honor and glory."¹

¹The English mounted troops which fought with the Polish cavalry against Napoleon boast of it even to this day, and the officers, when speaking of their regiment, never fail to say, "We fought with the Poles."—S. Chevrillon, "Aux Indes."

"I am pleased to meet you," answered Stasch.

The conversation ran along pleasantly, for the officers seemed to be entertained. It happened that these officers were traveling from Port Said to Cairo, to see the English ambassador and to receive from him final instructions in regard to the long journey which lay before them. The younger of the two was a doctor in the army, and the one who talked to Stasch, Captain Glen, was traveling from Cairo by way of Suez to Mombasa, where he was to rule over the entire district surrounding this harbor, which stretched out as far as the Samburuland and Rudolf Lake. Stasch, who enjoyed reading stories of African travels, knew that Mombasa lay several degrees beyond the equator. He knew, too, that the bordering countries, although the English now find them interesting, are really but little known, being quite wild, full of elephants, giraffes, rhinoceroses, buffaloes, and all kinds of antelopes, which are constantly seen by army merchants and missionary expeditions. So the boy envied Captain Glen from the bottom of his heart and promised to visit him in Mombasa, so that he might hunt lions and buffaloes with him.

"All right, but I beg for a visit from this little lady," answered Captain Glen, laughing and pointing to Nell, who had just left the window to sit down beside him.

"Miss Rawlison has her father," answered

Stasch, "and I am only taking care of her during the journey."

Thereupon the second officer turned round suddenly and asked: "Rawlison? Is he not the canal director who has a brother in Bombay?"

"My uncle lives in Bombay," answered Nell, raising a finger.

"In that case, my dear, your uncle is married to my sister. My name is Clary. We are related, and I am heartily glad that I have met you and made your acquaintance, little one."

The doctor was very much pleased. He said that as soon as he arrived in Port Said he had inquired for Mr. Rawlison at the director's office, but was told that he had gone away for the holidays. He also expressed his regret that the ship in which he and Glen were going to Mombasa was to sail from Suez in a few days, and so he would be unable to take a trip to Medinet. He asked Nell to remember him to her father, and promised to write to her from Mombasa.

The two officers now directed most of their conversation to Nell, so that Stasch was somewhat in the background. At every station dozens of oranges, fresh dates, and even excellent sherbet were served. Stasch and Nell did full justice to these good things, as did Dinah also, for among her other excellent qualities was an unusual fondness for eating.

In this way the journey to Cairo passed very quickly. The officers on leaving kissed Nell's

little hands and head, and shook Stasch by the hand, and then Captain Glen, who admired the resolute boy very much, said, half in earnest and half in jest:

"Listen, my boy! Who knows where, when, and under what circumstances we may meet again? But remember that you can always count on my good will and my help."

"And I can promise the same to you, sir," answered Stasch, making a dignified bow.

CHAPTER IV

MR. TARKOWSKI and Mr. Rawlison, who loved his little Nell more than his life, were delighted at the arrival of the children. The two young people greeted their fathers with equal enthusiasm, and at once began to inspect the tents, the interiors of which were all completely fitted up and prepared to welcome the beloved guests. They saw that the tents were as spacious as large rooms, handsomely fitted with a double roof, lined with blue and red flannel, and that the floors were covered with rugs. The Cook Company, which was so well thought of by the high officials of the canal, had done all in their power to make things comfortable and pleasant for them. At first Mr. Rawlison had feared that a lengthy stay in the tent might injure Nell's health, but at last he gave his consent, because in bad weather they could always move to the hotel. But now, having

taken a good look at everything, including the surroundings, he came to the conclusion that the days and nights spent in the open air would be a hundred times better for his only daughter than the gloomy rooms of a small town hotel. They were also fortunate in having fine weather. Medinet, surrounded on all sides by the sandy hills of the Libyan desert, has a far better climate than Cairo, and is not named "land of roses" without good reason. As a result of its protected position, and because of the moisture in the air, the nights are not nearly so cold as in other southernly parts of Egypt, and the winter is really delightful. In November the vegetation is most luxuriant. Date-palms, olives (not many of which are found in Egypt), figs and orange-trees, enormous nuts, pomegranates, and various other southern plants cover this beautiful oasis like a forest. The gardens are fairly overrun with acacias, lilacs, and roses, so that during the night every breath of air carries their overpowering perfume. One breathes here from the bottom of one's lungs, and "does not want to die," as the natives say. Heluan, on the opposite bank of the Nile, is the only other place with a similar climate, although it is situated much farther north, and therefore the vegetation is not so luxuriant.

But Heluan had sad associations for Mr. Rawlison, for it was there that Nell's mother had died. Therefore he preferred Medinet, and as he looked at the beaming face of the

little girl he resolved to buy some land and a garden here, to build a comfortable English house, and to spend every holiday he could procure in this favored spot, and perhaps, when his services were no longer necessary on the canal, to make this his permanent residence. But these were embryo plans for the distant future.

Meanwhile, the children had been flitting about like flies ever since their arrival, for they wanted to see all the tents, as well as the donkeys and camels hired by Cook, before dinner-time. But it so happened that the animals were grazing some distance away, so that the children could not see them until the next day. On the other hand, to compensate them for their disappointment, Nell and Stasch were delighted to see Chamis, the son of Chadigi, their good friend from Port Said. He was not one of Cook's servants, and even Mr. Rawlison was surprised to see him in Medinet, but as he had previously employed Chamis to carry his instruments, he took him along now to run errands and perform other services.

The evening meal proved to be very good, for the old Copt, who for several years filled the position as cook for the company, took pride in showing his skill. The children told how they had made the acquaintance of the officers during the journey, and this especially interested Mr. Rawlison, whose brother Richard was married to one of Dr. Clary's sisters,

and had resided in India for several years. As they were without children, the uncle was very fond of his little niece, whom he only knew from photographs, and he inquired about her in all his letters. The two fathers were also much amused at the invitation which Stasch had received from Captain Glen to go to Mombasa. The boy took this invitation quite seriously, and made up his mind some day to visit his new friend on the other side of the equator. Mr. Tarkowski was obliged to explain to him that the English officials never stay long on duty in the same place—owing to the treacherous climate of Africa—and before he, Stasch, would be grown up the captain would be at his tenth post, or perhaps no longer in this world.

After dinner the whole party went outside the tents, where the servants put up canvas chairs, and prepared siphons of soda-water and brandy for the two gentlemen. It was now night and unusually warm, and the full moon made it as brilliant as day. The white walls of the ugly buildings looked green in contrast to the tents, the stars twinkled in the firmament, and the air was filled with the perfume of roses, acacias, and heliotrope. The town was now asleep. In the silence of the night all that could be heard was an occasional loud cry from the cranes, herons, and flamingoes, the sound of which came in with the breeze from the Nile toward Karoon Lake. Suddenly the bark of a dog was heard, which surprised

42 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Stasch and Nell, for it seemed to come from the tent they had not yet visited, in which were kept saddles, tools, and various things necessary in traveling.

"What a large dog that must be," said Stasch.

Mr. Tarkowski began to laugh. Mr. Rawlison also laughed; then knocking the ashes off his cigar, he said:

"Well, it was no use to lock him up."

Then he turned to the children.

"To-morrow, as you know, will be Christmas, and this dog was to be a surprise for Nell from Mr. Tarkowski, but as the surprise has begun to bark I am obliged to tell you about it to-day."

When Nell heard this she quickly climbed on Mr. Tarkowski's knee and put her arms around his neck; then she jumped on her father's knee.

"Papa, dear, how happy I am, how happy!"

The embraces and kisses seemed endless; at last Nell stood on her feet, and looking into Mr. Tarkowski's eyes, said:

"Mr. Tarkowski—"

"Well, Nell, what is it?"

"Now that I've found out he is here, I ought to see him to-day!"

"I knew," cried Mr. Rawlison, pretending to be very much excited over the matter, "that this little fly would not be content with only hearing about it."

Mr. Tarkowski turned to Chadigi's son and said:

"Chamis, bring the dog here."

The Sudanese at once disappeared behind the kitchen-tent and soon stepped forth leading an enormous animal in leash.

Nell drew back.

"Oh," she cried out, seizing her father's hand.

But Stasch, on the contrary, went into ecstasies.

"That is a lion, not a dog."

"His name is Saba (lion)," answered Mr. Tarkowski. "He belongs to the breed of mastiffs, the largest dogs in the world. This one is only two years old, but is already enormous. Don't be afraid, Nell. He is as gentle as a lamb. Chamis, let him loose!"

Chamis let go the leash and the dog, feeling himself free, began to wag his tail, to rub himself up against Mr. Tarkowski, with whom he had already made friends, and to bark for joy.

By the light of the moon the children admired his large round head with its hanging lips, his strong paws, his great size, which with the golden yellow of his whole body gave him the appearance of a lion. In all their lives they had never seen anything like him.

"With such a dog one could safely wander through Africa," cried Stasch.

"Ask him if he can catch a rhinoceros for us," said Mr. Tarkowski.

It is true Saba could not answer this ques-

44 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

tion, but he wagged his tail still harder and rubbed himself up against them so confidently that Nell suddenly lost all fear and began to stroke his head.

"Saba, dear, good Saba!"

Mr. Rawlison bent down over him, raised his head toward the little girl's face, and said:

"Saba, look at this little lady. She is your mistress. You must obey and protect her—do you understand?"

"Wurgh!" Saba was heard to say in a deep bass, as if he really understood what was wanted of him.

And he did understand even better than one would imagine, for he took advantage of his head being nearly on a level with the girl's face to lick her little nose and cheeks with his broad tongue as a sign of allegiance.

That made every one laugh. Nell had to go into the tent to wash her face. When she returned after a quarter of an hour she saw that Saba had laid his paws on Stasch's shoulders, and that Stasch bent under the weight. The dog was a head taller than he.

Meanwhile bedtime had arrived, but the little girl begged to be allowed to talk for another half-hour to get better acquainted with her new friend. And they became friends so soon that it was not long before Mr. Tarkowski placed her on his back, as ladies ride. She was afraid of falling off, so he held her, and told Stasch to lead the dog by the collar. After she had

ridden a short distance Stasch tried to mount this peculiar saddle-horse, but the latter quickly sat on his hind legs and Stasch unexpectedly found himself on the sand.

The children were just about going to bed when from afar off, on the moon-lit public square, two white figures appeared, running toward the tent.

Saba, who until now had been so gentle, began to bark in a deep and menacing manner, so that Mr. Rawlison ordered Chamis to hold him by the collar again. Meanwhile the two men, dressed in white burnouses, stopped before the tent.

"Who is there?" asked Mr. Tarkowski.

"Camel-drivers," said one of the newcomers.

"Ah, you are Idris and Gebhr? What do you wish?"

"We have come to ask whether you will need us to-morrow?"

"No. To-morrow and the day after are great holidays, during which it is not customary for us to make excursions. Come three days from now, early in the morning."

"We thank you, effendi."

"And have you good camels?" asked Mr. Rawlison.

"Bismillah!" answered Idris. "Real saddle-horses with fat humps and gentle as lambs. Otherwise Cook would not have engaged us."

"Do they not jolt considerably?"

"Sir, you can lay a handful of beans on the

backs of any of them, and not one will fall off, no matter how fast they gallop."

"If he's exaggerating he at least does it in true Arab style," said Mr. Tarkowski, laughing.

"Or in Sudanese style," added Mr. Rawlison."

Meanwhile Idris and Gebhr still stood there like two white posts and carefully surveyed Stasch and Nell. The moonlight illuminated the faces of the two sand-drivers and made them look as if carved out of bronze. The whites of their eyes looked greenish from beneath their turbans.

"Good-night," said Mr. Rawlison.

"May Allah protect you by day and by night, effendi!"

At these words they bowed and departed. Saba was evidently not pleased with the two Sudanese, and as they left he sent a deep, thunderous growl after them.

CHAPTER V

FOR some days following they made no excursions. But to compensate for this, when the first star appeared on Christmas night Mr. Rawlison's tent was illuminated with hundreds of lights burning on the little Christmas-tree for Nell. The customary fir-tree had been replaced by a *salpiglossis* plant cut out of a garden in Medinet, but nevertheless Nell found

among its branches a quantity of dainties to eat, and a beautiful doll, which her father had bought for her in Cairo. Stasch received from his father the much-longed-for English gun, besides cartridges, hunting paraphernalia, and a riding-saddle.

Nell was beside herself with joy, and Stasch, although imagining that any one owning a real gun should be correspondingly sedate, could not keep away from it, and choosing a moment when everything was quiet around the tent, he walked about on his hands. He was especially clever in performing this feat, which he had often practised at school in Port Said, and he sometimes did it to entertain Nell, who envied him his skill.

Christmas day and the first part of the vacation the children spent inspecting their presents and training Saba. Their new friend proved to be exceedingly intelligent. On the very first day he learned to give his paw, bring handkerchiefs—which, however, he did not return willingly—and he was made to comprehend that it was not the thing for a gentleman's dog to lick Nell's face. Nell held her finger up and taught him various things, and by the affirmative wagging of his tail he gave her to understand that he was listening with due attention and was profiting by these good lessons. During the walks in the sandy town square in Medinet, Saba became more famous every hour, but this, like all fame, had

a reverse side, for he drew a great crowd of Arab children after him. At first they remained at a distance, but becoming bolder on account of the gentleness of the "monster," they approached, and at last swarmed around the tent, so that no one could move freely. And as every Arab child sucks a piece of sugar-cane from morning till night, the children are always followed by swarms of flies, which are not only annoying, but dangerous, for they spread the germs of the Egyptian eye-disease. Therefore the servants tried to drive away the children. But Nell not only interfered to protect them, but divided amongst the younger ones sweetmeats, which caused them to adore her and at the same time naturally increased their numbers.

Three days later the general excursions began. Sometimes they traveled on the narrow-gage railroads, of which the English had built many in Medinet-el-Fayoum, sometimes partly on donkeys, and again on camels. It is true they found that the praise bestowed on these animals by Idris was much exaggerated, for not only beans, but people, found it difficult to stay on their backs. Yet after all there was a tiny grain of truth in what he said. The camels really did belong to the riding species, and as they were well fed with maize, they had fat humps, and showed such an inclination to gallop that they had to be held back.

The Sudanese, Idris and Gebhr, notwith-

standing the savage glare in their eyes, gained the confidence and approval of the party, especially on account of the zest with which they worked and the great attention they paid to Nell. Gebhr had always a cruel, brutal expression on his face, but Idris, who was not slow to notice every one of the party adored this little person as the apple of his eye, declared over and over again that he would be more careful of her than of himself. Nevertheless, Mr. Rawlison imagined that Idris wanted to get at his pocket by means of Nell, but as he thought that nobody could help loving his dear little only daughter, he was grateful to him and did not spare the bakshish.

In the course of five days the party visited the ruins of Crocodilopolis, which lie near the town. It is there the Egyptians used to pray to their god, Sobek, who had a human body with a crocodile's head. The next excursion was made to the Hawara pyramid and the ruins of the Labyrinth, and the longest excursion, made on camel-back, was to Karoon Lake. The northern bank of this lake, save for the ruins of some old Egyptian towns, is a wilderness in which not a vestige of life remains; but south of the lake stretches a beautiful, fertile region, the banks being overgrown with heather and canebrake, in which innumerable flocks of pelicans, flamingoes, herons, wild geese, and ducks make their homes. There Stasch found his first opportunity to show what

a good aim he could take and what a good shot he was. Whether he used an ordinary gun or his Renommier rifle, his shots were so true that after each one the astonished Idris and the Arab rowers smacked their lips, and each time a bird fell into the water they cried out, "Bismillah and Manalieh!"

The Arabs declared that there were a great many wolves and hyenas on the bank opposite the wilderness, and that if the carcass of a sheep were to be hidden there they would be almost certain of getting a shot. In consequence of what they heard Mr. Tarkowski and Stasch spent two nights in the wilderness near the ruins of Dimeh. But the Bedouins stole the first sheep as soon as the huntsmen had left, and the second only attracted a lame jackal, which Stasch brought down. All further hunting had to be postponed, for it was now time for the two engineers to begin their journey to inspect the water-works being erected at Bahr-Yoosuf, in the vicinity of El-Lahun, to the southeast of Medinet. Mr. Rawlison was only waiting for the arrival of Mrs. Olivier. But, unfortunately, instead of her arrival, they received a letter from the doctor telling them that she was again a victim of erysipelas, due to the bite, and would be unable to leave Port Said for some time. They were in a predicament. It was impossible for them to take the children, old Dinah, the tents, and all the servants with them, because the engineers would

be here to-day and there to-morrow, and they might receive an order to go as far as the great Ibrahim Canal. Therefore, after some consideration Mr. Rawlison decided to leave Nell behind in care of Dinah and Stasch, and also of the agent of the Italian Consul and the native "Moodir" or governor. Mr. Rawlison promised Nell, who was very unwilling to part with her father, that whenever feasible he and Mr. Tarkowski would make trips to Medinet when in the vicinity, and that they would invite the children to come to them if there should be anything especially worth seeing.

"We are taking Chamis along with us," he said, "and we will send him to you if necessary. Dinah must always accompany Nell; but as Nell does what she likes with her, you, Stasch, must look after both of them."

"You can rest assured," answered Stasch, "that I shall protect Nell as if she were my own sister. She has Saba, I have the rifle, and now let any one dare harm her."

"That is not the point!" said Mr. Rawlison. "You can not possibly need Saba and the rifle. Only please see that she does not get too tired, and also that she does not take cold. I have asked the Consul to send for a doctor from Cairo at once should she become ill. We will send Chamis as often as possible to bring us news from you. The Moodir will also visit you. Besides, I hope we shall not be away very long."

Mr. Tarkowski also cautioned Stasch well. He told him that Nell did not need his protection, for in Medinet, as also in the whole province of El-Fayoum, there were no wild people nor wild animals, and that it would be ridiculous, and unworthy of a boy in his fourteenth year, to imagine such a thing. And so he had only to be careful and attentive, and not to undertake any kind of an expedition on his own account, especially on camels with Nell, for one ride on them tires any one out. But when Nell heard this she looked so sad that Mr. Tarkowski had to calm her.

"Of course," he said, stroking her hair, "you shall ride on camels, but with us, or on the way to us, when we send Chamis to fetch you."

"And can we not make any excursions by ourselves, not even tiny little ones?" asked the girl.

And with her forefinger she demonstrated exactly the size of the little excursions. The fathers at last gave in, on condition that they would be led on donkeys and not on camels, and that they were not to go out to the ruins, where they might easily fall into a hole, but on the roads to the neighboring fields and the gardens on the outskirts of the town. The Drago-
mans and Cooks servants were always to accompany the children.

Then the two gentlemen left, but they did not go far away—only to Hawaret-el-Makta—so that ten hours later they were able to return

to Medinet for the night. This they did for several successive days, until they had inspected the work in the vicinity. Then, as they were obliged to inspect work in places somewhat farther away, Chamis came riding up at night, and early in the morning took Stasch and Nell along with him to the little town where their fathers wanted to show them something of interest. The children spent most of the day with their fathers, and toward sunset returned to their tents in Medinet. But some days Chamis did not come, and then Nell, notwithstanding she had the company of Stasch and Saba, in whom she always discovered new talents, would watch lovingly for the messenger. In this manner the time passed until the feast of the Three Holy Kings, on which day the two engineers returned to Medinet.

Two days later they went away again, after having announced that they would now be gone a longer time, and would probably travel as far as Beni Suef, and from there to El-Fasher, to the canal which stretches along the Nile far southward. Therefore the children were greatly surprised when Chamis appeared at Medinet on the third day about eleven o'clock. Stasch, who had gone to the pasture to watch the camels, saw him first. Chamis talked with Idris and told Stasch that he was there only on his and Nell's account, and that he was coming to the tents to tell them where their two fathers had ordered them to go. The boy im-

54 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

mediately ran with this great piece of news to Nell, whom he found playing with Saba before the tent.

"Have you heard the news yet? Chamis is here!" he cried out from afar.

Nell immediately began to hop, holding both feet together, as little girls do when skipping.

"We are going away! We are going away!"

"Yes, we are going away, and quite far away."

"And where to?" asked she, brushing aside the hair from her forehead.

"I don't know. Chamis said he would come here directly and tell us."

"Then how do you know that we are going far away?"

"Because I heard Idris say that he and Gebhr would depart at once with the camels. That means that we are going by train and that the camels will be sent there in advance to where our fathers are, and from there we shall make various excursions."

Nell had hopped about so long that her loose front hair covered not only her eyes, but her whole face, and her feet rebounded as quickly as though made of rubber.

A quarter of an hour later Chamis came and bowed before them:

"Khauagé (young man)," said he to Stasch, "we leave in three hours by the next train."

"For what place?"

"To El-Gharak el-Sultani, and from there, together with the two gentlemen, on camels to Wadi Rayan."

Stasch's heart beat with joy, but at the same time he was surprised at Chamis' words. He knew that Wadi Rayan was a large, round, sandy ledge of rocks which rises in the Libyan Desert to the south and southwest of Medinet, and that Mr. Tarkowski and Mr. Rawlison had said when they left that they were going in a diametrically opposite direction—toward the Nile.

"What has happened?" asked Stasch. "So my father and Mr. Rawlison are not in Beni Suef, but in El-Gharak?"

"That is so," answered Chamis.

"But they have given orders to have their letters sent to El-Fasher."

"In this letter the elder effendi tells why they are in El-Gharak." And he searched his clothes a while for the letter, and then called out:

"Oh, Nabi! (prophet) I have left the letter in the packet with the camel-drivers. I will run and get it before Idris and Gebhr depart."

He ran to the camel-drivers, and meanwhile the children and Dinah began to prepare for the journey. As a longer excursion lay before them, Dinah packed up some underlinen and warmer clothes for Nell. Stasch also thought of his things, and took special pains not to forget the rifle and the cartridges, as he hoped to

come across wolves and hyenas on the sand-dunes of Wadi Rayan.

Chamis did not return until an hour later, so bathed in perspiration and so out of breath that he could hardly speak a word.

"I did not reach the camel-drivers in time," he finally said. "I tried to overtake them, but without success. But that is of no consequence, for we shall find the letter and also the two effendis in El-Gharak. Is Dinah going with us?"

"What?"

"Perhaps it would be better for her to stay behind. Neither of the effendis has said anything about her."

"Still they planned the journey, arranging for Dinah always to accompany the little girl, and therefore she will go with us on this trip."

Chamis bowed, placed his hand on his heart, and said:

"Sir, let us hurry or else we shall miss the *katr* (train)."

The baggage was ready, and they arrived at the station in time. It was not over thirty kilometers from Medinet to Gharak, but the train on the little branch line which connects these towns goes so slowly and stops so often that if Stasch had been alone he doubtless would have preferred traveling by camel to going by train, for he calculated that Idris and Gebhr, who had departed two hours earlier, would reach Gharak before him. But this would

have been too long a journey for Nell; so her young protector, having been cautioned by both fathers, was very careful not to fatigue the girl. Besides, time passed so rapidly that they hardly knew that they had arrived at Gharak.

The little station, from which Englishmen usually made excursions to Wadi Rayan, was quite deserted. They saw only several veiled women with baskets of oranges, two strange Bedouins, camel-drivers, and Idris and Gebhr with seven camels, one of which was laden with luggage. On the other hand, there was not a trace of Mr. Tarkowski or Mr. Rawlison; but Idris explained their absence as follows:

"Both gentlemen have ridden toward the desert to set up the tent they brought from Estah, and have instructed us to follow them."

"And how can we find them among the mountains?" said Stasch.

"They have sent guides to meet us."

At these words he pointed to the Bedouins, the elder of whom bowed down before them, rubbed his finger in his one remaining eye, and said:

"Our camels are not so fat as yours, but they are just as agile. We shall be there in an hour."

Stasch felt glad that they could spend the night in the desert, but Nell was somewhat disappointed; until now she had certainly expected to meet her papa in Gharak.

In the meanwhile the station-master, a

drowsy Egyptian wearing a red fez, approached, and as he had nothing else to do he began to gaze at the European children.

"These are the children of the Inglesi who rode toward the desert early this morning armed with guns," said Idris, as he lifted Nell into the saddle.

Stasch gave his gun to Chamis and seated himself beside Nell, for the saddle was large and fashioned like a palanquin, except that it had no roof. Dinah sat down behind Chamis, the others also mounted camels and followed them, and so they all departed.

Had the station-master looked after them he might have been surprised, for the Englishmen of whom Idris had spoken were traveling directly toward the ruins in Sudan, whereas the children were going straight toward Talei, in an opposite direction. But he had gone into his house, for there were no more trains to stop at Gharak that day.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the weather was remarkably fine. The sun had passed to the western side of the Nile and was sinking below the desert. The golden and purple hues of the sunset illuminated that side of the heavens. The atmosphere was so permeated with the glow as to be nearly blinding in its brilliancy. The fields assumed a lilac hue, but the heights, taking on a pure amethyst color, were sharply outlined against the twilight background. The world lost all semblance to

reality, and the light effects were as weird as those seen in some plays.

As long as they rode over green and plowed land the Bedouin leader led the march at a moderate pace, but the moment the camels felt the desert sand crunch under their feet the whole scene suddenly changed.

"Allah! Allah!" screamed the savage voices of the Bedouins.

At the same time the cracking of whips was heard, and the camels, changing from a trot to a gallop, began to race like a whirlwind, throwing clouds of the sand and loose gravel into the air with their feet.

"Allah! Allah!"

When a camel trots he shakes his rider up more than when he gallops—a gait these animals seldom use—for then he sways more. And so this wild ride amused the children at first. But it is well known that too rapid swinging causes dizziness, and after a long time, as their pace did not slacken, little Nell's head began to swim and everything became indistinct before her eyes.

"Stasch, why are we racing so?" she cried, as she turned toward her companion.

"I think they have given the camels a loose rein and now they can not hold them back," Stasch replied.

But when he saw that the girl's face was somewhat pale, he called to the Bedouins, who were racing along ahead of them, to go more

slowly. But his cries only resulted in their screaming "Allah!" again and the animals increasing their speed.

At first the boy thought that the Bedouins had not heard him, but when there was no answer to his repeated demands, and when Gebhr, who was riding behind them, continued to whip up the camel on which he and Nell sat, he came to the conclusion that instead of the camels having broken loose, it was the men who were hurrying them along for some reason of their own.

It occurred to him that perhaps they had gotten on the wrong road, and were obliged to run like this to make up for lost time, fearing that the two gentlemen might scold them if they arrived late. But he soon saw that this could not be the reason, for Mr. Rawlison was more likely to be angry with him for tiring out Nell. So what could this mean? And why did they not obey his orders? In his heart the boy began to be very angry and also very much worried over Nell.

"Stop!" he cried with all his might, turning to Gebhr.

"Onskout! (be quiet)," roared the Sudanese in answer. And they raced on.

In Egypt night comes on toward six o'clock. The sunset soon died away and a full, round moon, colored red from the reflection of the sunset, arose and flooded the desert with its mild light. In the silence nothing was to be heard save

the camels gasping for breath, the quick, hollow clatter of their hoofs on the sand, and now and then the cracking of the Bedouins' whips. Nell was so tired that Stasch was obliged to hold her in the saddle. Every minute she asked if they would not soon arrive at their destination, and only the hope of seeing her father soon again buoyed her up. But they both looked around in vain. An hour passed—then another. There was neither tent nor campfire to be seen.

Then Stasch's hair stood on end with terror—he realized that they had been kidnapped.

CHAPTER VI

MR. RAWLISON and Mr. Tarkowski were really waiting for the children, but not in the midst of the sandy heights of Wadi Rayan, for they had no reason or wish to go there, but in a quite different place, in El-Fasher, a town on the canal of that name, where they were inspecting work done during the preceding year. The distance between El-Fasher and Medinet is about forty-five kilometers in a straight line, but as there is no direct communication, one is obliged to travel by El-Wasta, which almost doubles the distance. Mr. Rawlison consulted the time-table and calculated as follows:

"Chamis went away the day before yesterday," he said to Mr. Tarkowski, "and in El-Wasta he took the train coming from Cairo, so

he must have been in Medinet this morning. The children only need an hour to pack their things. But supposing they left at noon, they would have had to wait for the night train, which runs along the banks of the Nile, and, as I have forbidden Nell to travel by night, they probably started early this morning, and they will reach here a little after sunset."

"Yes," said Mr. Tarkowski. "Chamis must rest a little; it is true, Stasch is hot headed, but in anything that concerns Nell he can be relied on. Besides, I sent him a card telling him that they were not to leave at night."

"He is a capable boy and I have full confidence in him," replied Mr. Rawlison.

"Yes, indeed, so have I. In spite of his many faults, Stasch is a boy of good character and never lies, for he is brave, and only a coward lies. He does not lack energy, and later, when his judgment develops, I think he will be able to fight his way through the world."

"Certainly; but just think if you ever acted with deliberation at his age?"

"I must confess that I did not!" replied Mr. Tarkowski, laughing; "but perhaps I was not so self-conscious as he is."

"He will get over that. Meanwhile, be glad that you have such a boy."

"And you that you have such a sweet, dear little soul as Nell."

"God bless her," answered Mr. Rawlison, much affected.

The two friends clasped hands, and then began to examine the plans and cost of the water-works, and so the time passed quickly until evening.

At six o'clock, at night-fall, they went to the station, walked up and down the platform, and continued talking about the children.

"Lovely weather, but cool," Mr. Rawlison said. "I wonder if Nell has taken warm enough clothing with her?"

"Stasch doubtless thought of it, and Dinah, too."

"I am sorry we did not go to Medinet ourselves, instead of having them brought to us."

"Remember that I suggested this."

"I know, and if it were not that we have to continue farther south I would have agreed to it, but I calculated that the journey would take a considerable time, and so we should not have had as long a time with the children. Besides, I will confess that it was Chamis who gave me the idea of having them brought here. He told me that he wanted to see them so much, and that he would be greatly pleased if he were sent after them. I am not surprised that he has taken a fancy to them."

Further conversation was cut short by the signals announcing the approaching train. Soon afterward the fiery eye of the locomotive appeared in the darkness, and at the same time its panting breath and whistling could be heard.

64 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

A string of lighted cars passed along the platform, then the train shook and stopped.

"I did not see them at any of the windows," said Mr. Rawlison.

"Perhaps they are sitting farther back in the car and will soon get out."

The travelers began to leave the train, but they were chiefly Arabs, for with the exception of beautiful palms and acacia groves El-Fasher has nothing worth seeing. The children had not come.

"Either Chamis did not catch the train at El-Wasta," said Mr. Tarkowski, slightly annoyed, "or he may have overslept and so took the night train, and they may arrive to-morrow."

"That may be," answered Mr. Rawlison, much worried, "but perhaps one of them is ill."

"If this were so Stasch would have wired."

"Who knows, perhaps we may find a telegram awaiting us at the hotel."

"Let us go and see."

But in the hotel there was no news for them. Mr. Rawlison became even more uneasy.

"Do you know what also might have happened?" said Mr. Tarkowski. "If, for instance, Chamis overslept, he would not have told the children; he would merely go to them to-day and tell them that they are to travel to-morrow. He will excuse himself to us by saying that he did not understand our orders. Anyway, I will wire to Stasch."

"And I to the moodir of Fayoum."

Soon afterward two telegrams were sent off. As yet there was no occasion to be alarmed, but while awaiting a reply the engineers passed a bad night. They were up again early in the morning.

Toward ten o'clock a telegram arrived from the moodir that read as follows:

"It has been ascertained at the station that the children left the day before for Gharak el-Sultani."

It is easy to imagine that the fathers were greatly surprised and very angry at this unexpected news. For a while they gazed at each other, as if they had not understood the words of the telegram; then Mr. Tarkowski, who was a very excitable man, struck the table with his fist and said:

"This is Stasch's work, but I will soon cure him of such ideas."

"I should never have thought that of him," answered Nell's father. But after a while he asked:

"Well, and Chamis?"

"Either he has not met them and does not know what to do, or he has gone in search of them."

"That is what I think."

An hour later they left for Medinet. In the tents they learned that the camel-drivers had also departed, and at the station it was stated on good authority that Chamis had left for El-Gharak with the children.

Things looked darker and darker, and they could only be explained at El-Gharak.

It was at this station that the terrible truth began to unveil itself.

The station-master, the same sleepy man with the colored spectacles and the red fez, told them that he had seen a boy about fourteen years old and a little girl eight years old with an elderly negress, and that they had ridden toward the desert. He was not quite sure whether they had eight or nine camels with them, but he had noticed that one of them was laden, as if going on a long journey, and that the two Bedouins also carried a great deal of baggage on their saddles, and he remembered that when he had looked at the caravan one of the camel-drivers, a Sudanese, told him that they were the children of Englishmen who had ridden to Wadi Rayan.

"Have these Englishmen returned?" asked Mr. Tarkowski.

"Yes. They returned yesterday with two wolves they had shot," answered the station-master, "and I was very much surprised that they did not bring the children back with them. But I did not ask them the reason, for it was none of my business."

With these words he returned to his work.

During this explanation Mr. Rawlison's face turned as white as paper. Looking at his friend with a wild stare, he raised his hat, lifted

his hand to his perspiring forehead, and staggered as if he were about to fall.

"Rawlison, be a man!" cried Mr. Tarkowski. "Our children have been kidnapped. They must be saved!"

"Nell! Nell!" repeated the unhappy Englishman. "Nell and Stasch! It is not Stasch's fault! They have both been brought here by treachery and then carried off. Who knows why? Perhaps in hopes of a ransom. Chamis is certainly in the plot, and so are Idris and Gebhr."

Now he remembered what Fatima had said, that both these Sudanese were of the Dangali tribe, to which the Mahdi belonged, and that Chadigi, the father of Chamis, was also of the same tribe. As he thought of this his heart nearly stopped beating, for now he knew that the children had not been carried off in the hopes of a ransom, but to be exchanged for Smain and his family.

"But what would the tribe of the evil-minded prophet do with them? It would be impossible for them to hide themselves in the desert or anywhere along the banks of the Nile, for in the desert they would all die of hunger and thirst, and on the bank of the Nile they would be sure to be discovered. So there was only one course for them to pursue, and that was to flee with the children to the Mahdi!"

This thought filled Mr. Tarkowski with terror, but this energetic man, who had for-

merly been a soldier, soon composed himself, recalled vividly to his memory all that had happened, and tried to think of some means of rescuing the children.

"Fatima," he reasoned, "had no cause to revenge herself on our children; so if they were carried off it was only to give them into Smain's hands. There is no possibility of their being threatened with death, and in misfortune that is something; but, on the other hand, the road that lies before them may lead to their destruction."

He told Mr. Rawlison what he thought, then he continued:

"Idris and Gebhr, savage and ignorant men, think that the hosts of the Mahdi are not far off, but the Mahdi has advanced as far as Khartum, which is about two thousand kilometers from here. This distance they would have to travel along the banks of the Nile; they can not leave this route, for if they do the camels and the people would die of thirst. Go immediately to Cairo and ask the Khedive to send telegrams to every military station and make a raid on both banks of the river. The sheiks on the banks must be offered a large reward for the capture of the kidnappers. Every one coming to the villages to get water must be held up. In this way Idris and Gebhr will surely fall into the hands of the law, and we will have our children once more."

Mr. Rawlison had regained his composure.

"I will go," he said. "These villains have forgotten that England's army under Wolseley is now hastening to the aid of Gordon and will separate them from the Mahdi. They shall not escape. They can not escape! I will send a telegram to our minister at once and then I shall go. What do you intend to do?"

"I shall telegraph for leave of absence, and without waiting for a reply I shall follow in their footsteps along the Nile to Nubia, to direct the search."

"Then we shall meet, for I also intend doing likewise from Cairo on."

"All right! And now to work!"

"With God's help!" answered Mr. Rawlison.

CHAPTER VII

MEANWHILE the camels stormed like a hurricane over the sand glistening in the moonlight. It was night. The moon, at first red and large as a wheel, paled and rose higher. The distant heights of the desert were covered with a muslin-like, silvery mist, which instead of hiding them from view clothed them with a mysterious light. Ever and anon the plaintive whining of jackals rang out from among the scattered rocks.

Still another hour passed. Stasch put his arm around Nell to support her and to lessen the springing swing of this wild ride, which was most fatiguing to the girl. The girl asked her-

70 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

self over and over again why they were racing so and why they did not see their fathers' tents. At last Stasch decided to tell her the truth, which sooner or later must come to light.

"Nell," he said, "take off one glove and let it drop without attracting attention."

"Why, Stasch?"

He pressed her to him and answered with an unusual apprehensiveness in his voice:

"Do as I tell you."

Nell held on to Stasch with one hand, and as she was afraid to let go, she began to draw off the glove with her little teeth, each finger separately, and when she had pulled it entirely off, she let it drop to the ground.

"After a little while throw the other down also," said Stasch a few minutes later. "I have thrown mine away, but yours can be seen better because they are light."

He noticed that the girl looked questioningly at him, and continued:

"Nell! Do not be frightened! But, you see—it is possible that we may not meet your father or mine, and that these horrid people have carried us off. But don't be frightened, for if that is the case, an expedition will be sent after us and we shall be overtaken and brought back. That is why I told you to drop your glove, so that the searchers can trace us. Meanwhile we can do nothing more, but later I will think of something. I am sure I can

think of something, but don't be afraid, just have faith in me."

After having learned that she would not see her father, and that they were fleeing far into the desert, Nell began to tremble from fright and to cry; at the same time she nestled closer to Stasch, and sobbingly asked him why they had been carried off and where they were being taken to. He consoled her as best he could, using almost the same words with which his father had consoled Mr. Rawlison. He said that their fathers would follow them and communicate the news to all the garrisons along the Nile. He assured her that whatever happened he would never leave her and that he would always protect her.

But her longing for her father and her desire to see him overcame her fear, and she continued to weep for a long while. Thus they raced through the bright night, over the desert sand, both feeling very sad. But Stasch was not only completely discouraged and frightened, but thoroughly ashamed. It is true he was not to blame for what had happened, but, on the other hand, he remembered how he used to brag and how his father had often corrected him for it. Before this he had been thoroughly convinced that there could be no situation too great for him to meet; he had considered himself an invincible bully, and felt ready to challenge the whole world. But now he realized that he was a small boy with whom any one could do

72 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

as he liked, and that he was galloping along on a camel against his will, because a half-savage Sudanese drove it from behind. This was a great mortification to him, but he saw it was impossible to make any resistance. He was obliged to acknowledge to himself that he was really afraid of these people and the desert, and that he dreaded what might still be in store for him and Nell. But he faithfully promised not only her, but himself also, that he would look after her and protect her, if need be at the cost of his own life.

Nell, tired out from crying and the wild ride, which had now lasted six hours, began to doze, and from time to time went fast asleep. Stasch, who knew that to fall off a galloping camel means instant death, tied her fast to him with a rope which he found on the saddle. But after a while it seemed to him that the camels were not galloping so fast, although they were now running over flat, soft sand. In the distance glowing heights appeared to loom, and on the plains imaginary objects, apt to be seen at night in the desert, came and went in fantastic fashion. The moon shone paler and paler from the heavens. Before them peculiar, pinkish, transparent clouds massed themselves at random and glided away as if blown along by gentle zephyrs. Stasch noticed that the camels and the burnouses of the Bedouins in coming into illuminated places suddenly assumed a pinkish hue, and that a delicate pink

enveloped the whole caravan. Sometimes the clouds changed to a bluish hue. This phenomenon continued until they reached the heights.

On arriving at this chain of hills the camels slowed down still more. On every side were rocks, which either protruded from the sandy hillocks or were strewn about in the wildest confusion. The ground had become stony. They passed several depressions strewn with stones and resembling dried-up beds of rivers. Sometimes they came upon narrow passes, which they were obliged to ride around. The animals began to step more carefully, lifting up their feet as if dancing, when picking their way through the hard shrubs of Jericho roses, with which the sand-dunes and rocks were plentifully covered. The camels stumbled frequently, and it was evident they needed a rest.

The Bedouins then halted in a narrow, abandoned pass, slid out of their saddles, and commenced to unload the baggage. Idris and Gebhr followed their example. They began to look after the camels, to loosen their saddles, to take down the provisions, and to look for flat stones on which to build a fire. They could find neither wood nor manure, which the Arabs burn, but Chamis, Chadigi's son, picked Jericho roses, heaping them up in a large pile, and lighted them. Whilst the Sudanese were busy with the camels, Stasch, Nell, and old

74 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Dinah, the nurse, found themselves together a little apart from the others. But Dinah was more overcome than the children and was unable to say a word. After wrapping Nell up in a warm rug, she sat down on the ground beside her and began to kiss her hands and to sigh. Stasch immediately asked Chamis what was the meaning of all that had taken place, but the latter showed his white teeth as he laughed and went off to collect more Jericho roses. Then Stasch asked Idris, who answered curtly: "You will see," and threatened him with his finger. When at last the fire from the rose branches, which at first only flickered, burst into flame, every one sat around it in a circle—except Gebhr, who remained with the camels—and they began to eat little cakes of maize and dried lamb and goat's meat. The children, ravenously hungry after the long journey, ate also, although Nell's eyes continually closed in sleep; but meanwhile by the pale light of the fire Gebhr's dark face with its shining eyes appeared, as he held up two small, light-colored gloves and asked:

"To whom do these belong?"

"To me!" answered Nell in a sleepy and tired voice.

"To you, you little viper," hissed the Sudanese through his clenched teeth. "Are you marking the way so that your father can trace us?"

Furiously angry, he beat her with his

scourge, a terrible Arabian whip, which will tear open even the skin of a camel. Although Nell was covered with a thick rug, she screamed out with fright and pain, but he did not succeed in giving her a second blow, for Stasch immediately jumped up like a wild-cat, threw his head against Gebhr's chest, and grasped him by the throat. So suddenly did this happen that the Sudanese fell on his back with Stasch on top of him, and they both rolled over and over on the ground. The boy was very strong for his age, but Gebhr was soon able to overcome him. At first he loosened his hands from his throat, then threw him face downward on the ground, and pressing down his neck with his fist, began to use the scourge on his back.

The screams and cries of Nell, who grasped the hands of the savage and begged him to let Stasch up, would have been of no avail had not Idris unexpectedly come to the boy's rescue. He was older and much stronger than Gebhr, and from the beginning of their flight from Gharak el-Sultani every one obeyed his orders. Now he tore the scourge out of his brother's hand, and throwing it far away, cried:

"Begone, you fool!"

"I shall beat this scorpion to death!" answered Gebhr, grinding his teeth.

But Idris caught hold of him by the chest, and looking him in the eyes said in a threatening undertone:

76 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"The noble¹ Fatima has forbidden us to hurt these children, for they pleaded for her—"

"I shall beat him to death!" repeated Gebhr.

"And I tell you that you shall not lift the scourge against either of them again. If you do I will repay you ten times over each lash that you inflict."

Then he tossed and shook him like a palm branch, and continued:

"These children are Smain's property, and should one of them not arrive alive, the Mahdi himself, may God increase his days even more, would hang you. Do you understand, you fool?"

The name of the Mahdi had such an influence on all his believers that Gebhr immediately hung his head, and with great respect and fright continually repeated:

"Allah akbar! Allah akbar!"

Stasch arose, panting and bruised, but convinced that if his father were to see and hear him now he would be proud of him, for not only had he run to Nell's assistance without hesitation, but even now, although the blows from the scourge burned him like fire, he did not think of his own pain, but began to console the girl and to ask her if the lashes had hurt her.

"What I got, I got; but he will not touch you again. Oh, if I only had some kind of a weapon!"

¹All the relatives of the Mahdi bore the title "Noble"

The little girl put both arms around his neck, and moistening his cheeks with her tears, she began to assure him that it did not hurt, and that she did not cry from pain, but out of sympathy for him. Thereupon Stasch whispered close to her ear:

"Nell, I swear I will not forgive him—not because he beat me, but because he struck you!"

With that the conversation came to an end. After a while the brothers Idris and Gebhr, who had become reconciled, placed coats on the ground and lay down on them, and soon Chamis followed their example. The Bedouins strewed maize around for the camels. Then they mounted two of the animals and rode off in the direction of the Nile.

Nell leaned her little head on Dinah's knee and fell asleep. The fire went out and for a while nothing was heard but the noise of the camels' teeth crunching the maize. Small clouds appeared in the heavens, and though they now and then obscured the moon, the night continued clear. From among the rocks came the ceaseless, pitiful whining of jackals throughout the deep hours of the night.

Two hours after their departure the Bedouins reappeared with the camels, which were loaded with leather bags filled with water. Relighting the fire, they sat down on the sand and began to eat. Their arrival awoke Stasch, who had fallen asleep, and also the two Sudanese and Chamis. Then began the following

conversation by the group seated around the fire, to which Stasch was an eager listener:

"Can we ride on?" asked Idris.

"No, for we must rest—we and our camels."

"Did any one see you?"

"No one. We advanced between two hamlets toward the river. We heard nothing but the barking of dogs in the distance."

"We shall always have to ride off for water at midnight, and fetch it from deserted places. When we pass the first cataract (Challal, Schellal) the villages will be farther apart and the people more devoted to the Prophet. We will certainly be pursued."

Thereupon Chamis turned over, and supporting his head on his hands, said:

"The Mehendisi will wait a whole night in El-Fasher for the children to come on the next train, and then they will go to Fayoum, and from there to Gharak. Not till they reach the latter place can they find out what has happened, and then they will have to return to Medinet, to send words along a copper wire to the towns on the banks of the Nile—and men on camels will pursue us. All this will take three days at least. We need not urge our camels on before then, and so we can smoke our pipes in comfort."

At these words he took a burning rose twig from the fire and lighted his pipe with it. Then Idris began, after the Arabian custom, to show his satisfaction by smacking his lips.

"Chadigi's son, you have brought the matter off well," he said, "but we must make use of these three days and nights to advance as far as possible toward the south. I shall not breathe freely until we have passed over the desert between the Nile and Chargeh.¹ Pray God that the camels do not give out."

"They will stand it," remarked one of the Bedouins.

"The people also say," Chamis interposed, "that the Mahdi's soldiers—God lengthen his life—have already got as far as Assuan."

Stasch, who had not lost a word of this conversation, and had also noted what Idris had told Gebhr before, arose and said:

"The army of the Mahdi is near Khartum."

"La! La! (No! No!)" said Chamis.

"Do not listen to his words," answered Stasch, "for he not only has a dark skin, but a dark brain. If you were to buy fresh camels every three days and race as you have done to-day, it would take you a month to reach Khartum. Perhaps you do not know that not only the Egyptian, but the English army also, will hold you up."

These words made somewhat of an impression, and Stasch, aware of it, continued:

"Before you are between the Nile and the great oasis all the roads in the desert will be guarded by a number of soldiers. Ha! The words on the copper wire run quicker than the

¹A large oasis to the west of the Nile.

80 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

camels. How will you ever be able to escape them?"

"The desert is large," answered one of the Bedouins.

"But you have to keep near the Nile."

"We can cross to the other side, and while they are looking for us on this side we shall be on the other."

"The words running over the copper wires will reach the towns and villages on both banks of the river."

"The Mahdi will send us an angel, who will place his fingers on the eyes of the English and Turks (Egyptians), and he will cover us over with his wings."

"Idris," said Stasch, "I am not speaking to Chamis, whose head is as empty as a gourd bottle, nor to Gebhr, who is an infamous jackal, but to you; I know that you want to bring us to the Mahdi and deliver us over to Smain. But if you are doing it to gain money, then know that this little girl's father is richer than all the Sudanese together."

"And what does that mean?" interrupted Idris.

"What does it mean? Return of your own free will and the great Mehendisi will not be sparing of his money, neither will my father."

"Or they will hand us over to the government, and we will be hanged."

"No, Idris. You will certainly be hanged if you are caught in your flight—that is sure

to happen. But if you return voluntarily you will not be punished; moreover, you will be rich men till the end of your days. You know that the white people of Europe always keep their word. And I give you the word of honor of both Mehendisi that it is so, and that it will be as I say."

Stasch was really convinced that his father and Mr. Rawlison would a thousand times rather keep the promise he made than to let them both, especially Nell, take such a terrible journey and lead a still more terrible life in the midst of the savage and angry tribes of the Mahdi. So he waited with beating heart for Idris to answer, but the latter was wrapt in silence; and after a while he merely said:

"You say the father of the little girl and yours would give us a great deal of money?"

"That is so."

"And would all their money be able to unlock the gates of Paradise for us, which the blessing of the Mahdi opens?"

"Bismillah!" hereupon cried the two Bedouins and Gebhr and Chamis.

Stasch now lost all hope, for he knew that though Orientals are very greedy for money and are easily corrupted, when a real Mohammedan looks at anything from a religious point of view no treasures of this world can tempt him.

Idris, encouraged by the assenting cries of his fellows, continued to talk, not apparently

82 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

in answer to Stasch, but for the purpose of gaining their further approval and praise.

"We are fortunate enough to belong to the same tribe as the holy prophet, but the noble Fatima and her children are his relatives, and the great Mahdi loves them. So when we deliver you and this little girl into his hands he will exchange you for Fatima and her children and bless us. Know that even the water in which he bathes in the morning will, according to the Koran, heal the sick and wash away sins. How powerful must his blessing then be?"

"Bismillah!" repeated the Sudanese and the Bedouins.

But Stasch, grasping the last thread of hope, said: "Then take me along, but the Bedouins must return with the little girl. They will deliver Fatima and her children in exchange for me alone."

"They are more likely to give them up in exchange for you both."

Thereupon the boy turned to Chamis:

"Your father will have to bear the brunt of your deeds."

"My father is now in the desert on his way to the prophet," answered Chamis.

"Then he will be caught and hanged."

But here Idris thought it better to encourage his comrades.

"The hawks," he said, "who are to eat the flesh of our bones are not yet hatched. We

know what threatens, but we are no longer children, and we have been familiar with the desert for some time. These people," pointing to the Bedouins, "have often been in Barbary, and they know the roads that are traversed only by gazels. There no one will find us and no one will follow us. We must go to Bahr-Yoosuf and then to the Nile to draw water, but we shall do that by night. And besides, do you suppose that there are no secret friends of the Mahdi by the river? Let me tell you that the further south we go, the surer we are of finding whole tribes and their sheiks only waiting for an occasion to grasp their swords in defense of the true faith. These tribes will give the camels food and water and set the pursuers on the wrong track. We know that the Mahdi is far away, but we also know that every day brings us nearer to the sheepskin on which the holy prophet kneels to pray."

"Bismillah!" cried his comrades for the third time.

It was evident that Idris had greatly risen in their estimation. Stasch realized that everything was lost, but thinking that at any rate he could protect Nell from the fury of the Sudanese, he said: "After a ride of six hours the little lady has reached here half dead. How do you suppose that she will stand such a long journey? If she dies, I shall die, too, and who will you then have to take to the Mahdi?"

84 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

At first Idris could not answer. Stasch, seeing this, continued:

"And how will the Mahdi and Smain receive you when they learn that through your stupidity Fatima and her children must forfeit their lives?"

But the Sudanese collected himself and said:

"I saw how you seized Gebhr by the throat. By Allah, you are a young lion, and will not die, and she——"

Here he looked at Nell's little head leaning up against old Dinah's knees, and in a peculiarly soft voice he concluded:

"We will make a nest, a little bird's nest, for her on the hump of the camel, so that she will not feel the fatigue and can sleep on the way as peacefully as she is sleeping now."

As he said this he went toward the camels, and with the help of the Bedouins began to prepare a seat for the girl on the back of the best dromedary. While doing this they talked a great deal, and argued a little; but at last they were able to arrange, with the help of ropes, rugs, and bamboo rods, something like a deep, immovable basket, in which Nell could either sit or lie down, but from which she could not fall. Over this seat, which was so spacious that Dinah also found room in it, they stretched a canvas roof.

"Do you see," said Idris to Stasch, "quails' eggs would not break in these cloth rugs. The old woman will ride with the little lady, so that

she can wait on her night and day. You will sit with me on another camel, but you can ride alongside of her and take care of her."

Stasch was glad that he had at last gained that much. Thinking over the situation, he became convinced that possibly they would be found before they reached the first cataract, and this thought gave him courage. But he needed sleep, and he attempted to fasten himself to the saddle with ropes, for as it was not necessary to support Nell any longer, he thought he might get a few hours' rest.

The night was now brighter, and the jackals stopped whining in the narrow passes. The caravan was to start directly, but first the Sudanese, on seeing the sunrise, went behind a rock a few steps off, and there began their morning ablutions, following out exactly the instructions of the Koran, but instead of water, which they wanted to save, they used sand. Then they raised their voices, and went through the first morning prayer. In the great stillness their words rang out distinctly: "In the name of the merciful and pitying God. Glory and honor be to the Lord, the ruler of the world, who shows mercy and pity on the day of judgment. We honor Thee, we confess to Thee, we beg help of Thee. Lead us on in the path of those for whom Thou dost not spare Thy benefits, but not in the ways of evildoers, who have incurred Thy anger, and live in sin. Amen."

When Stasch heard these words he also

86 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

raised his eyes to heaven—and in this distant country, in the midst of the yellow, silent sand of the desert plains, he began:

“We fly to thy patronage, O holy Mother of God, despise not our petitions in our necessities!”

CHAPTER VIII

NIGHT faded away. They were just about to mount the camels when they suddenly perceived a desert wolf, which, dropping its tail between its legs, crossed over the narrow pass that lay about a hundred feet from the caravan, and gaining the opposite plateau, ran on, terrified, as if fleeing before an enemy. In the Egyptian wilderness there are no wild animals of which wolves are afraid, and therefore this sight greatly worried the Sudanese. What could this mean? Could it be that the pursuers were coming upon them? One of the Bedouins quickly climbed a rock, but hardly had he taken a look than he ran down again.

“By the prophet,” he cried, distracted and frightened. “There seems to be a lion running toward us, and he is already quite near.”

Just then from behind the rock a “Wurgh” in a deep bass voice was heard, at which Stasch and Nell with one voice cried out with joy:

“Saba! Saba!”

As this means “lion” in Arabic, the Bedou-

ins were still more frightened. But Chamis laughed out loud and said:

"I know this lion."

With these words he gave a long whistle, whereupon an enormous dog rushed among the camels. When he saw the children he bounded upon them, threw Nell down as she stretched out her hands toward him, climbed up on Stasch, then ran around them, whining and barking. Again he knocked Nell down, again climbed up on Stasch, and at last lay down at their feet and began to pant.

His flanks were sunken in and froth dripped from his protruding tongue, but he wagged his tail and raised his eyes, looking affectionately at Nell, as if to say to her: "Your father told me to protect you, and here I am!"

The children sat down on either side of him and began to caress him. The two Bedouins, who had never seen a similar creature before, looked at him with surprise, and repeatedly cried out: "Ouallach! O kelb kebir!" (Great heavens! What a large dog!). The latter remained quiet for a while, then raised his head in the air and drew in his breath through his black nose, which resembled an enormous truffle, sniffed, and sprang to the dying fire, near which lay remains of food.

At the same moment the goat and sheep bones began to crack and break like straws between his enormous teeth. The remains of a meal for eight people, including Dinah and

88 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Nell, were enough for even such a "kelb kebir."

But the Sudanese were worried at the dog's arrival; the two camel-drivers drew Chamis to one side and began to talk to him in a worried and excited manner:

"Idris brought this dog here," cried Gebhr; "but how was he able to find his way to the children, for they came to Gharak by train?"

"Probably he followed the tracks of the camels," answered Chamis.

"That is bad. Any one seeing him with us will mark our caravan, and will be able to show which road we have taken. By all hazards we must get rid of him!"

"But how?" asked Chamis.

"Here's a gun—take it and put a bullet in his head."

"It is true we have a gun; but I don't know how to fire it. Perhaps you do."

Chamis might have been able to fire it off in case of necessity, for Stasch had often opened and shut the lock of the gun in his presence; but his sympathy was aroused by the dog, which he had grown to like, even before the arrival of the children in Medinet. Besides, he knew very well that the two Sudanese had no idea how to use a gun of the newest pattern, and that they would not take the trouble to find out.

"If you are unable to do it," he said with a cunning smile, "then no one but this little Christian will be able to kill the dog; but this

gun might go off several times in succession, and so I do not advise you to give it into his hands."

"Heaven forbid!" answered Idris. "He would shoot us down like quail."

"We have knives," remarked Gebhr.

"Try them, but remember that you also have a throat, which the dog may tear open before you have time to stab him."

"Then what are we to do?"

Chamis raised his eyebrows.

"Why do you want to kill the dog? Even if you bury him in the sand the hyenas will dig him out, and the pursuers will find his bones and know that we have not gone along the Nile, but have crossed over to this side. So let him follow us. Whenever the Bedouins go for water, and we are hidden in a ravine, you may be sure that the dog will stay with the children. Allah!"

"It is well he caught up to us here; otherwise he would have led the pursuers on our tracks as far as Barbary. You will not need to feed him, for if he is not satisfied with the remnants of our meals he will not go hungry; he can always catch a hyena or a jackal. Let him alone, I tell you, and waste no more time chattering."

"Perhaps you are right," said Idris.

"If I am right, I will give him water, so that he will not run to the Nile and be seen in the villages."

90 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Thus was Saba's fate decided, and after having rested a little and had a good meal he lapped up a dish of water, and thus refreshed, followed the caravan with renewed energy.

They now rode over a tableland, on which the wind had made furrows of sand, and from which reached wide stretches of desert. The sky assumed the hue of a pearl mussel-shell. Light clouds gathered in the east, shining like opals, and then melting into golden tints.

First one, then a second ray of light shot forth, and the sun—as is usual in southern countries, in which there is scarcely any twilight or dawn—did not rise, but burst forth from behind the clouds like a pillar of fire, flooding the horizon with living light. Heaven and earth were calm, and far as human eyes could see lay the trackless sand plains, now suddenly disclosed in the vivid glow.

"We must hurry," said Idris, "for we can be seen here from a great distance."

The camels, strengthened by their rest, and having had plenty to drink, raced along with the fleetness of gazels. Saba remained behind, but there was no fear that he would get lost and not be forthcoming at the next feeding-place. The dromedary on which Idris rode with Stasch ran alongside of Nell's camel, so that the children could easily speak to each other. The seat which the Sudanese had padded proved to be very comfortable, and

the girl really looked like a little bird in a nest; even if asleep she could not fall out. This ride fatigued her less than the one during the night, and the bright daylight gave her and Stasch courage. The lad's heart was full of hope; as Saba had overtaken them, might not the rescuers also be able to do so? He immediately mentioned this to Nell, who now smiled at him for the first time since they had been carried off.

"And when will they overtake us?" she asked in French, so that Idris would not understand.

"I don't know. Maybe to-day, maybe to-morrow, maybe in two or three days."

"But on the return journey we shall not ride on camels?"

"No. Only as far as the Nile, and then on the Nile to El-Wasta."

"Oh, that's good, that's good!"

Poor Nell, who used to be so fond of riding on camels, was now evidently sick and tired out.

"On the Nile—to El-Wasta and to papa!" she began to repeat in a sleepy voice.

As she had not rested long at their last stopping-place, she now fell asleep, the heavy sleep that comes in the morning after great fatigue. Meanwhile the Bedouins drove the camels ceaselessly on without letting them stop for an instant. Stasch noticed that they were going toward the interior of the desert.

To make Idris less confident that the party would be able to elude the pursuers, and also

92 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

to show him that he felt certain of their being found, Stasch said:

"You are leaving the Nile and the Bahr Yoosuf, but that will be useless, for they will not search for you on the banks, where there is one string of villages, but in the interior."

And Idris said:

"How do you know we are leaving the Nile? The banks can not possibly be seen from here."

"Because the sun, which is now in the east, warms our backs; that means that we have turned off toward the west."

"You are a clever boy," said Idris approvingly.

And after a while he added:

"But the pursuers will not overtake us—neither will you escape from us."

"No," he answered. "I shall not run away, unless it is with her." And he pointed to the sleeping Nell.

They raced along until noon, scarcely making a halt. When the sun stood high in the heavens and it began to be very warm, the camels, although it is not their nature to perspire profusely, were dripping with perspiration, and went along much more slowly. Once more the caravan was surrounded by rocks and sand heaps. Ravines, which served as beds of rivers called "Khor" during the rainy season, were seen oftener than before. At last the Bedouins made a halt in one quite hidden be-

tween the rocks. But scarcely had they alighted from the camels than they began to yell and run forward, bending down and throwing stones. Stasch, who had not yet dismounted, saw a strange sight. From between the dried shrubs that grow plentifully at the bottom of the "Khors" appeared a large snake, which wound its way through the clefts of the rocks as quick as lightning and glided off to a hiding-place of its own. The angry Bedouins followed it, and Gebhr hurried to their assistance with a knife. But the unevenness of the ground made it as difficult to strike the snake with a stone as to stab it with the knife, and in a little while all three returned with terror on their faces, and the usual cries of the Arabs were heard.

"Allah!"

"Bismillah!"

"Maschallah!"

Then the two Sudanese looked at Stasch with a penetrating and questioning glance. But he had not the least idea why they did so.

Meanwhile Nell had dismounted, and though she was not so tired as the night before, Stasch spread a cloth rug over a shady, level spot and told her to lie down, so that, as he said, she could stretch out her feet. The Arabs walked about eating their mid-day meal, which consisted only of zwiebach, dates, and a drop of water. The camels were not given a drink, as they had been watered during the night. The

94 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

faces of Idris, Gebhr, and the Bedouins bore an anxious look, and the time of rest passed in silence. At last Idris took Stasch to one side and began to question him in a mysterious and troubled manner:

"Did you see that snake?"

"Yes."

"Was it you who bid it appear before us?"

"No."

"Some misfortune will surely come upon us, for these clumsy fellows were not able to kill the snake."

"The gallows await you."

"Silence! Perhaps your father is a sorcerer?"

"Yes," answered Stasch without hesitation, immediately realizing that these savage and superstitious beings regard the appearance of a snake as a bad omen—an augury that the flight would not be successful.

"So your father sent it to us," continued Idris. "He ought to realize that we might take revenge on you for his witchcraft."

"You will do nothing to me, for Fatima's sons would pay you back for every wrong done to us."

"Did you understand? Remember that if it had not been for me, not only you, but the little girl, too, would have bled to death under Gebhr's scourge."

"I shall intercede only for you. Gebhr will be hanged."

Thereupon Idris looked at him for a while in surprise and said:

"Our lives are not in your hands yet; you talk to us as if you were our master."

After a pause he added:

"You are a peculiar boy; I have never seen any one like you before. I have always thought well of you until now—but take care, do not make any threats."

"God punishes traitors!" answered Stasch.

It was quite evident that the tone of authority with which the boy spoke, together with the bad omen in the form of the serpent which had escaped, made Idris feel exceedingly uneasy. Even later, when mounting his camel, he frequently repeated: "Yes, I have more than once been kind to you!" as if he wished at all events to impress this on Stasch's mind; then he began to finger the nut-shell beads of his rosary and to pray.

Toward two o'clock in the afternoon the heat—although it was winter—became unbearable. Not a cloud could be seen in the sky, but the edges of the horizon had become gray. Over the caravan soared several hawks, which from their great height cast black shadows on the yellow sand. In the heated air there was a smell as of something burning. Although the camels did not change their pace, they began to sniff. One of the Bedouins now approached Idris.

"There is something bad coming," he said.

"What do you think it can be?" asked the Sudanese.

"Evil spirits have awakened the wind, which sleeps in the western part of the desert, and it has risen out of the sand, and is now rushing toward us."

Idris rose in his saddle, looked out into the distance, and replied:

"That's right. It is coming from the west and south, but it does not seem to be as furious as the Khamsin."¹

"But only three years ago it buried a whole caravan in the vicinity of Abu Hammed, and did not uncover it until last winter. Ulla! It may blow with such force as to stop up the camels' nostrils, and dry up the water in the leather bags."

"We must hasten on, and steer our course so that we will strike only the edge of it."

"We are running straight into it, and can not possibly avoid it."

"The sooner it comes, the sooner it will be over."

At the same time Idris whipped up his camel with the scourge, and the others followed his example. For a while nothing was heard but the cries of "Yalla! Yalla!" and the hollow sound of the thick whips, that resembled the loud clapping of hands. The western horizon, which had been almost white, had now become dark. The heat continued, and the sun blazed

¹This is a southwest wind that blows only in the spring-time.

down on the heads of the riders. The hawks must have soared very high, for their shadows became smaller and smaller, and at last entirely disappeared.

It now became oppressively sultry. The Arabs cried out to the camels until their throats were dry; then they became quiet, and a death-like silence ensued, broken only by the groaning of the animals and the rustle of two small sand-foxes¹ with enormous ears, which sped past the caravan, fleeing to the opposite side of the desert.

The same Bedouin who had previously spoken to Idris said once more in a peculiarly strange tone of voice:

"The wind will soon break loose and bury everything."

"All the more need of helping the little girl."

Idris whipped up the camel, and for a while they continued in silence.

"Why don't you speak?" asked Stasch.

"Because I am wondering whether I had better tie you to the saddle or bind your hands behind your back."

"Have you gone crazy?"

"No. But I can guess what you want to do."

"The searchers will overtake us in any case, so I need not do anything."

"The desert is in God's hands."

They again relapsed into silence. The coarse sand had ceased falling, but a fine red

¹An animal called "feuschak," smaller than a fox.

dust, somewhat resembling mildew, remained in the air, through which the sun shone like a sheet of copper. Distant objects could now be plainly seen. Before the caravan extended a plain, on the edge of which the Arab's sharp eyes again perceived a cloud. It was higher than the previous ones and rose in columns that formed enormous funnels with wide-spreading tops. At this sight the hearts of the Arabs and Bedouins quaked with fear, for they recognized the sand-spout. Idris raised his hands, and lifting them to his ears, began to bow to the advancing whirlwind. His belief in his own God apparently did not prevent him fearing others, for Stasch distinctly heard him say:

"Lord! We are your children, therefore do not devour us!" And the "Lord" rushed upon them, and hit the camels with such force that they almost fell to the ground. The animals huddled together in a compact mass, with their heads turned toward the center. Enormous quantities of sand began to fly. The caravan was enveloped in darkness that momentarily grew more intense, in which they saw black and indistinct objects—like enormous birds or camels—sweep rapidly past them, as if frightened by the hurricane. The Arabs were greatly alarmed, for they thought they saw the souls of the men and animals that had perished in the sand. In the midst of the tumult and howling of the hurricane they heard strange voices, sometimes weeping, sometimes laugh-

ing, sometimes cries for help. These sounds were only delusions. Danger a hundred times more terrible threatened the caravan. The Sudanese well knew that if one of the great sand-spouts, which continually form in the center of the hurricane, should drag them into its vortex, it would knock down the riders and disperse the camels, and, bursting upon them, would in the twinkling of an eyelash bury them under mountains of sand, there to remain until some similar storm should uncover their bones and scatter them over the desert.

Stasch nearly lost his breath; the sand blinded him, and he became dazed and dizzy. Sometimes it seemed as though he heard Nell crying and calling, and so he thought of her alone. Knowing that the camels were standing closely together, and that Idris could not be paying any attention to him, he determined to steal over to the girl's camel, not that he wished to escape, but only to help and encourage her. He had scarcely put out his hands to catch Nell's saddle than Idris' large arm held him back. The Sudanese picked him up like a feather, laid him down, and tried to bind him with a palm rope, and after he had tied his hands, placed him across the saddle. Stasch clenched his teeth and resisted as much as possible, but all in vain. As his throat was parched and his mouth full of sand, he could not convince Idris that he only wanted to assist the girl, and had no intention of trying to

100 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

escape. But a little later, feeling that he was all but suffocated, he cried out in a strained voice:

"Save the little Biut! Save the little Biut!"¹

The Arabs preferred to think of saving their own lives. So terrible was the sand-storm that the Bedouins could neither sit on the camels, nor could the camels remain standing. Chamis and Gebhr sprang to earth to hold the curb-bits, which were fastened under the lower jaws of the animals. Idris pushed Stasch off the back of the saddle and endeavored to control his camel. The animals stood with their legs far apart so as to resist the raging storm, but strength failed them, and the caravan was blown about in the sand, which pricked like pins, and torn to pieces as though with lashes from sand-thongs. Slowly at first, then faster, they began to twist and stagger as the hurricane advanced. From time to time the sand whirls dug grave-like hollows beneath their feet, or the sand and gravel, rebounding from the flanks of the animals, instantly formed hillocks, which reached up higher than their knees. In this manner hour after hour passed, the situation becoming more and more alarming. Idris at last realized that the only means of deliverance lay in remounting the camels and racing with the storm. But that meant returning in the direction of Fayoum, where

¹The Little Girl.

Egyptian courts and the gallows awaited them.

"Ha! There is nothing else to be done," thought Idris. "The hurricane has delayed our pursuers also, and as soon as it ceases we will gallop once more toward the south."

So he cried out for them to remount. But just then something happened that completely changed the situation. The dark sand-clouds, now almost jet black, were suddenly permeated with bluish light. Then the darkness grew still more intense, and now arose in the higher regions of the air the slumbering thunder. Awakened by the whirlwind, it began to roll loudly, threateningly, and angrily between the Arabian and Libyan deserts. It seemed as if mountains were falling from the sky. The deafening noise increased; it made the earth tremble, and began to encircle the entire horizon.¹ From time to time the sound crashed with such terrible force that it seemed as though the firmament was broken and falling to earth. Sometimes it was like a hollow, distant rumbling; then again it broke forth still louder, flashed its blinding lightning, threw thunderbolts, rose and fell and crashed again. This continued a long while.

At last the wind ceased, as if terrified, and after a long, momentous pause the doors of

¹The author heard a peal of thunder near Aden, which continued incessantly for nearly half an hour,

102 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

heaven closed and a stillness as of death ensued.

A little later the voice of the leader rang through the silence:

"God is over the storm and hurricane! We are saved!"

They started off again; but the darkness was so impenetrable that although the camels ran side by side, their riders could not see each other, being obliged to call out every minute so as not to become separated. From time to time the lightning pierced the sand-filled air with vivid blue and red flashes, and then the darkness became so intense that it might almost be felt. Despite the confidence that the leader inspired in the Sudanese, they still felt uneasy, for they ran on blindly, not knowing where they were going, whether turning round in a circle or going toward the north or south. The animals stumbled every minute and made but little speed, panting so peculiarly and breathing so hard that it seemed to their riders as if the whole desert was gasping from fright. At last came the first large raindrops that generally follow a hurricane, and the leader shouted through the darkness:

"Khor!"

They had reached a ravine. At first the camels stood motionless at the edge, then began to descend very carefully.

CHAPTER IX

THE ravine was broad and covered with stones, between which grew stunted thorn-bushes. Broken rocks formed its southern side. The Arabs observed these details in the lightning flashes, which were now less vivid but more frequent. They soon discovered a flat cave, or, speaking more exactly, a spacious niche, in the side of the rock, in which they could easily take refuge. The camels could also find a sheltered place on a slight elevation near by. The Bedouins and the Sudanese relieved the animals of their burdens and saddles, and Chamis, the son of Chadigi, went about collecting thorn branches for the fire. Large rain-drops fell intermittently, but the shower did not really begin until every one had lain down to sleep. At first the rain resembled threads, then ropes, and at last it seemed as if overflowing streams from invisible clouds were deluging the earth. But such showers, which occur only once in many years, even in winter cause the canals and the Nile to overflow, and in Aden they fill the enormous cisterns which are the mainstay of the town. Stasch had never seen anything like this before. A rushing stream filled the bed of the "Khors" and curtains of water covered the entrance of the cave. Nothing could be heard except the rushing of the water and the pattering of the rain. The camels stood on the height, and so the storm

at the most could but give them a bath; but the Arabs looked out every minute to see that the animals were not in any danger. On the other hand, the party found it very pleasant in the protecting niche to sit around the bright fire of brushwood, which was not wet by the rain. Joy was written on all their faces. Idris, who had unbound Stasch's hands on their arrival, so that he could eat, now turned to him and said with a scornful smile:

"The Mahdi is greater than all the white sorcerers. He stopped the sand-storm and sent the rain."

Stasch did not answer, for he was busy looking after Nell, who scarcely seemed to breathe. At first he took the sand out of her hair, and ordered old Dinah to unpack the things they had taken with them to go to their fathers; then he took a towel, moistened it with water, and carefully washed the child's face. Dinah could not do this, for she had gone nearly stone blind during the hurricane, and the washing of her heated eyelids at first brought no relief. Nell seemed indifferent to all Stasch's efforts, and only looked at him like a tired little bird, but when he drew off her shoes to shake out the sand, and then spread out the cloth rug for her to lie upon, she put her little arms around his neck.

In his heart he felt more and more sympathy for her; he now felt that he was her guardian, elder brother, and sole protector. He was also

aware that he was very fond of this little sister, a great deal more fond of her than he ever had been. He had liked her when at Port Said, but he looked upon her as a "little baby," and so, for instance, it never occurred to him then to kiss her hand when saying good-night. If any one had ever mentioned such a thing to him he would have thought that a thirteen-year-old gentleman could not do such a thing without affecting his dignity and his years. But now the general misfortune had awakened his slumbering affection for her, and he not only kissed one, but both of the girl's hands.

He lay down, still thinking of her. He decided to do something extraordinary to deliver her from captivity. He was prepared for everything—for wounds or for death—but with a slight reservation in his heart that the wounds would not hurt too much and that the death might not be a real one; for in the latter case he would not be able to see Nell's joy over her freedom. Then he began to think over the most heroic means of delivering her, but his thoughts became confused. For a while it seemed to him as if whole sand-clouds were burying them and then as if all the camels were trying to creep into his head—and then he fell fast asleep.

After the Arabs had attended to the camels, they sank down, dead tired from the fight with the whirlwind, and slept like logs. The fires went out, and it was pitch dark in the cave.

106 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Soon the sleepers began to snore, and outside was heard the pattering of the rain and the rushing of the water as it broke against the stones on the bed of the ravine. And so the night passed.

Before morning Stasch was so cold that he awakened from his sound sleep. It seems that the water, which had collected above them in the crevices of the rock, began to trickle drop by drop through a crack in the hollow of the cave. The boy sat up on the cloth rug, so sleepy at first that he could not tell where he was and what was happening to him. But he was soon wide awake.

"Ah!" he thought. "Yesterday there was a hurricane and we were carried off by it, and this is the cave where we took refuge from the rain."

He began to look around. At first he was surprised to see that the rain had ceased, and that it was no longer dark in the cave, for the moon, which was now low down near the horizon, about to set, illumined it. The entire interior of the broad but shallow niche could be plainly seen. Stasch distinctly noted the Arabs lying together, and close to the largest wall of the cave he saw the white dress of Nell, who was sleeping next to Dinah.

He felt exceedingly anxious about her.

"Sleep, Nell, sleep!" he said to himself. "But I can not sleep—I must, I must save her!"

Then, looking at the Arabs, he added: "Ah, I would like to——"

Suddenly he trembled, for his eye lighted upon the leather case containing the gun he had received at Christmas, and alongside of it the cartridges lay, so near—between him and Chamis—that he had but to stretch forth his hand to reach them.

His heart began to beat and to thump like a hammer. If he could but catch hold of the gun and the cartridges he would doubtless have command of the situation. In this case he would only have to creep quietly out of the niche, secrete himself a short distance away, between the rocks, and guard the entrance from that position. "When the Sudanese and the Bedouins awake," thought he, "they will notice that I have escaped, and all will rush out of the cave at once; then with two bullets I can shoot down the first two, and before the others reach me the gun will be reloaded. Chamis will be the only one left, but I will make short work of him."

Then he imagined the four dead bodies bathed in blood, and his heart was filled with horror and fright. To murder four people! It is true they are villains, but just the same, it is terrible! He remembered that in Port Said he had seen a fellah, a workman, who had been killed by the handle of a shaft-sinking machine, and what a terrible impression the quivering remains amid a pool of blood had made upon

him. The very thought of it caused him to shudder. And now he was about to kill four! Sin, horror! No! no! He could not do it!

He began to struggle with his thoughts. For himself he would not think of doing it—certainly not! But now it was a case of Nell, of her defense, her safety, and her life, for she certainly could not stand all these hardships and would surely die, either during the journey or in the midst of the wild, beastly tribes of Dervishes. What was the blood of such wretches in comparison with Nell's life, and was it right to hesitate in such a case? For Nell! For Nell!

Then a thought flew like a flash of lightning through his head and made his hair stand on end. What would happen if one of these villains should point a knife at Nell's breast and threaten to kill her if he, Stasch, would not surrender and give up the gun? What would happen then?

"In that case," said the boy to himself, "I should give myself up at once."

And at the thought of his helplessness he again threw himself down despairingly on the cloth rug.

The rays of moonlight now entered the opening of the cave at such an angle that it became dark inside. The Arabs still snored. Stasch lay quiet for a while, then a new thought dawned upon him.

Suppose he should creep out of the cave with

the gun, hide himself between the rocks, and not kill the men, but only shoot down the camels? It is true it would be a shame to sacrifice the innocent animals, but what was to be done? People kill animals not only to save lives, but also for their meat. Now one thing was certain, that if he were to succeed in shooting down four or five camels, it would be impossible to continue the journey. Not one of the caravan would dare visit the villages on the river-banks to buy new camels. So Stasch would promise, in the names of their fathers, that the men should not be punished, but be rewarded, and the only thing left for them to do would be to return.

That was all very well, but supposing they did not give him time to make these promises, but murdered him in the first onset of their wrath?

However, they would have to give him time and listen to him, for with a gun in his hand he would be able to keep them at a safe distance until he had said all he wanted to. They would realize that the only way to save themselves would be to surrender. Then he would put himself at the head of the caravan and lead it straight to the Bahr Yoosuf and to the Nile. They were still quite a distance from there—some one or two days' journey—for the Arabs had taken the precaution to travel quite far into the interior. But that was no matter; there would be several camels left, and on one

of these Nell could ride. Stasch began to examine the Arabs carefully. They were all sleeping the sound sleep of utter exhaustion; but as the night would soon be over, they might awaken at any moment. Immediate action was necessary. It would not be difficult to take the cartridge case, for it lay by his side; but it would not be so easy to get the gun, which Chamis had placed farther away, on the other side. Stasch hoped that he would be able to take it away, but he decided not to remove it from its case or adjust the gun barrel until he should get some distance from the cave, for he feared the click of the steel might awaken the sleepers.

The moment had come. The boy crept over Chamis like a worm, and grasping the box by the handle, picked it up and slowly drew it over to his side. Though he clenched his teeth and tried to overcome his emotions, his heart and pulse beat quickly, everything grew dark before his eyes, and his breath came and went in rapid gasps, and when the straps which closed the box creaked a little, cold drops of sweat stood in beads on his forehead. This single second seemed to him as long as a century. But Chamis never moved. The box was lifted over him and placed beside the cartridge case.

Stasch breathed again. Half the work was done. Now it was necessary to creep quietly out of the cave, run a short distance, hide him-

self in the rocks, open the case, adjust the gun, load it, and put a number of cartridges in his pocket. Then the caravan would be at his mercy.

Stasch's black silhouette stood out against the light background of the entrance to the cave. Another second and he would be outside. Another minute and he would hide himself in the rocks. And then, even if one of the robbers should awaken, before he realized what had happened, and before he could awaken the others, it would be too late. Fearing that he might knock down one of the many stones which lay at the entrance of the niche, the boy took one step forward and groped with the sole of his foot for firm ground.

He thrust his head out of the opening, and was just about to step out, when something unexpectedly happened which made the blood freeze in his veins. For through the dead silence Saba's joyful bark rang forth like thunder, filled the whole ravine, and awakened its sleeping echoes. The Arabs sprang up as one man out of their sleep, and the first thing that met their eyes was Stasch with the case in one hand and the cartridges in the other.

Ah, Saba, what have you done!

CHAPTER X

THEY at once set up a howl and fell on Stasch, tearing the gun and cartridges from his grasp; they threw him on the ground, bound his hands and feet with ropes, beat him, and stamped on him with their feet until Idris, fearing the boy would be killed, drove them away. Then they began to speak in broken sentences, as people do who have had some great danger hovering over them, from which they have only escaped by chance.

"That boy is Satan personified!" cried Idris, his face pale with fright and excitement.

"He would have shot us down as he would wild geese for dinner!" added Gebhr.

"Yes, if it hadn't been for this dog!"

"God sent him!"

"And you wanted to kill him!" said Chamis.

"From now on no one shall touch him!"

"He shall always have bones and water!"

"Allah! Allah!" repeated Idris, without being able to calm down; "and death hung over us! Uf!"

They looked with hatred at Stasch, who lay before them, but they were also somewhat surprised that this small boy had so nearly caused their defeat and destruction.

"By the prophet!" said one of the Bedouins, "but we must take care that this son of Eblis does not break our necks. We owe the Mahdi a snake! What do you intend to do with him?"

"His right hand must be cut off!" cried Gebhr. The Bedouins made no reply, but Idris would not allow them to do it. It occurred to him that if the expedition sent out in search of them should find them, they would be punished much more severely if they maimed the boy. And after all, who could tell whether the boy would not die as the result of the beating he had just received? If so, only Nell would remain to be exchanged for Fatima and her children.

When Gebhr drew a knife to execute his threat Idris grasped him by the wrist and held him back.

"No!" he said. "It would be a disgrace if five of the Mahdi's warriors were to fear one beggarly son of a Christian so much that they had to cut off his hand. Meanwhile we will bind him at night, and for what he has just attempted he will receive ten lashes with the scourge."

Gebhr was ready to carry out the threat at once. But Idris again pushed him back and told one of the Bedouins to administer the blows, whispering into his ear not to beat him too hard. As Chamis, because he had formerly served the engineers, or perhaps for some other reason, did not want to interfere in any way, the second Bedouin laid Stasch face downward, and the torture was just about to begin when something unexpected delayed it.

At the entrance of the niche Nell appeared with Saba. Although busy with her pet, which had rushed into the cave and thrown himself at her feet, she had heard the screams of the Arabs, but as Arabs and Bedouins in Egypt scream on every occasion as if they were murdering one another, she paid no attention to this. It was only after she had called Stasch and received no answer that she went out to see if he had, perhaps, mounted his camel, and she was terrified when by the first rays of dawn she saw Stasch lying on the ground, and above him a Bedouin standing with the scourge in his hand. At this sight she began to cry out with all the power of her childish lungs and to stamp her feet; but when the Bedouin paid no attention to her and gave Stasch the first blow, she rushed forward and covered the boy with her small body.

The Bedouin hesitated, for he had not been told to beat the girl, and meanwhile she cried out in tones of terror and despair:

"Saba! Saba!"

Saba understood, and with one leap he reached the entrance. The hair on his neck and back bristled, his eyes glared with a red light, while from his chest and his powerful throat came a thundering roar. Then his lips slowly receded, and his teeth, as well as his inch-long white fangs, stood out, displaying his bloody gums. The enormous dog now began to turn his head from right to left, as if he wanted to

give the Sudanese a good view of his terrible set of teeth and say to them:

"Look! With these I shall defend the children!"

They desisted at once, because they knew that they owed their lives to Saba and also that any one who attempted to approach Nell at that moment would have the enraged animal's fangs fastened in his throat.

So they stood there powerless, looking helplessly and inquiringly at one another, as if asking what was to be done now.

They hesitated so long that Nell had time to call old Dinah and order her to cut Stasch's bonds. Then the boy arose, and laying his hand on Saba's head, turned to the assailants:

"I did not mean to kill you," he said with clenched teeth, "but only the camels."

This speech, which was intended to pacify them, only terrified them the more, and they would certainly have attacked Stasch again had not Saba's flaming eyes and his still bristling hair kept them back. Gebhr still wanted to rush at Stasch, but a deep growl pinned him to the spot where he stood.

A short silence ensued—then Idris' far-resounding voice rang out:

"Let us break camp! Let us start on our way!"

CHAPTER XI

A DAY, a night, and another day passed, and they still continued galloping toward the south, only resting for a short time in the ravines, so as not to tire out the camels too much, to feed them and to give them water, and at the same time to attend to their own wants. For fear of being pursued they turned off more toward the west, as they did not need to worry about a supply of water for some time. The rain had only lasted seven hours, but it was such a heavy storm that Idris, Gebhr, and the Bedouins knew that enough water could be found for several days to come in the bed of the ravines and in the natural hollows and cavities made by the rocks. After a great downpour, as is generally the case, the weather was fine. The heavens were cloudless and the air so transparent that one could see for an immeasurable distance. During the night the star-strewn firmament shone with the lustre of a myriad jewels, and a refreshing coolness came from the desert sand.

The humps of the camels had become smaller, but the animals were well fed and still "keck," as the Arabs say, which means that they were not tired out. They ran so fast that the caravan advanced at almost as sharp a pace as on the day they departed from Gharak el-Sultani. Stasch was surprised to see that the Bedouins found provisions of maize and dates

in the many narrow passes among the clefts of the rocks protected from the rain. That led him to think that certain preparations had been made before they had been kidnapped and that everything had been planned beforehand between Fatima, Idris, and Gebhr on one side, and the Bedouins on the other. It was easy to guess that these men were partisans of and believers in the Mahdi, who wished to capture him, and that they were readily drawn into a conspiracy by the Sudanese. In the vicinity of Fayoum, near Gharak el-Sultani, there were many Bedouins camping in the desert with their children and camels, who went to Medinet or to the railway station trying to earn something. But these two Bedouins Stasch had never seen before; they could not have come from Medinet, because it seemed they did not know Saba.

It also occurred to the boy that perhaps it might be well to try to bribe them, but when he remembered their enthusiastic cries each time the Mahdi's name was mentioned he knew that this would be impossible. The boy did not, however, submit passively to all this, for his heart was full of wonderful energy that had only been stimulated by the misfortunes he had suffered. "Everything I have undertaken," he said to himself, "has ended in my being beaten black and blue. But even if I were beaten every day with the scourge, or killed, I should not cease trying to devise for Nell and

myself a means of escape from the hands of these villains. If the parties searching for us get hold of them, all the better; but I shall act as if I did not expect them to come at all."

Then when he thought what had happened to him, how these treacherous and cruel men had taken his gun away, had beaten him with their fists, and stamped upon him with their feet, he became furiously angry. He not only felt that he was conquered, but, proud as he was of being a white man, he felt especially humiliated by being subject to them. Above all, he felt the wrong done to Nell, and this, together with the exasperation that had taken deep root in his heart since his last misfortune, made him heartily hate the Sudanese with an irreconcilable hatred. It is true, he had often heard his father say that hatred blinds one, and that only those who are unable to rise above it give way to it, but for the present he could not suppress it or even hide it.

He could not even prevent its being noticed by Idris, who really began to feel uneasy, for he realized that in case the pursuers were to overtake them he could no longer count on the boy's interceding for him. Idris was always ready to undertake the most daring deeds, but, being a very sensible man, he said to himself that one must anticipate everything in case of defeat; in fact, always have a little side-door open for escape. Therefore after the last occurrence he wished to get back a little into

Stasch's good graces, and at the next stopping-place he began conversing with him.

"After what you attempted to do," he said, "I had to punish you—otherwise the others would have beaten you to death; but I told the Bedouins not to hit you too hard."

And on receiving no answer he continued:

"Listen; you yourself have said that white people always keep their promises, and therefore if you will swear to me by your God and by the head of this little "Biut" that you will not undertake to do us any harm, I will not have you bound up at night."

Even then Stasch did not answer a word, and it was only by the strange glint in his eyes that Idris realized he was speaking in vain.

But although Gebhr and the Bedouins coaxed him, he did not have Stasch bound at night. When Gebhr continued to insist, he answered him angrily:

"Instead of going to sleep, you will keep guard to-night. I have decided that henceforth one of us will keep guard while the others sleep."

And so from this day on relays of guards were arranged. That greatly hindered, in fact nearly completely frustrated, Stasch's plans, for each guard took good care to watch him well. But, on the other hand, the children were given more freedom, and were allowed to be near each other and converse freely. So at the next halting-place Stasch sat down by Nell to

120 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

thank her for her assistance. But although he was deeply grateful, he was incapable of expressing his respect and affection, and so he simply began to shake her little hands.

"Nell," he said, "you are very good, and I thank you; and besides, let me tell you that you acted like a person thirteen years old at least."

Such words from Stasch's lips were the highest praise, and the little girl's heart burned with joy and pride. At this moment it seemed to her that there was nothing too great for her to attempt.

"When I am grown up they will see!" she replied, casting an aggressive look in the direction of the Sudanese.

As she did not yet know just what had really happened, and why the Arabs had attacked Stasch, the boy began to relate how he had made up his mind to steal the gun, kill the camels, and force their captors to return with them to the river.

"If this had succeeded," he said, "we should have been free by this time."

"Did they wake up?" asked the girl with beating heart.

"They did wake up! That was Saba's doing; he came running along and began to bark enough to awaken the dead."

Then she was angry with Saba.

"Horrid Saba! For doing that I shall not

say a word to him when he comes running up! I shall just tell him that he is bad!"

Although Stasch was not in a laughing mood, he smiled and asked:

"How can you not speak a word to him and at the same time tell him that he is bad?"

Nell elevated her eyebrows to show her annoyance, and with a shy voice replied:

"He will see that by my face."

"Maybe. But he was not to blame, because he did not know what was going on; remember, too, that he came to our assistance."

The remembrance of this somewhat cooled Nell's anger, but she did not wish to forgive the evil-doer at once.

"Very well," she said; "but a real gentleman ought not to bark when greeting you."

Stasch smiled again.

"A real gentleman does not bark when greeting you or when saying good-by, unless he be a dog, and Saba is a dog."

Soon afterward a sad look came in the boy's eyes; he sighed again and again, and then got up from the stone on which they were sitting and said:

"The worst is that I can not free you."

Nell stood on tip-toe and put her little arms around his neck. She wanted to console him, wanted to murmur her thanks close to him, with her little face on his cheek; but as she could not find appropriate words, she merely clung more lovingly to his neck and kissed him

122 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

on his ear. Saba, who was always late—not so much because he could not keep step with the camels as because he chased jackals on the way and barked at the hawks crouching on the rocks—was seen running up and making as much noise as usual. As soon as the children saw him they forgot everything, and notwithstanding their sorry plight, they began caressing him and playing with him as usual, until the Arabs stopped them. Chamis gave the dog food and water, and then they all remounted and departed in great haste, going farther toward the south.

This was the longest ride they had taken at one stretch, eighteen hours with but one short halt. Only riding-camels, who have a considerable supply of water in their stomachs, can stand such a journey. Idris did not spare them, for he feared that the pursuers were surely at his heels. He realized that they must have started long ago, and conjectured that the two engineers were at the head of these expeditions and would waste no time. Danger threatened them from the river-side, for it was quite certain that the sheiks on both banks of the Nile would form scouting parties to go into the interior of the desert, and would hold back all travelers going south. Chamis felt certain that the government and the engineers had offered a great reward for their capture, and that consequently the desert was probably filled with searchers. The only way to avoid these

would be to go as far west as possible; but to the west lay the great oasis of Chargeh, where there was a telegraph. Besides, were they to go too far away from the river the water would give out after a few days and they would die of thirst. There was also the question of provisions. It is true that in the two weeks preceding the kidnapping of the children the Bedouins had hidden provisions of maize, zwieback, and dates in secret places known only to themselves, but these secret places were four days' journey from Medinet. Idris was terror-stricken at the thought that when the food gave out some of them would have to go to the villages on the river-banks to buy provisions, and that, on account of the strict watch and the rewards offered by the village sheiks for the capture of the fugitives, these might easily fall into the hands of the villagers and betray the whole caravan. The situation was indeed difficult, almost desperate, and Idris saw more clearly every day what a wild scheme he had undertaken.

"If we had only passed Assuan," said he to himself, his heart full of fear and despair. He did not believe Chamis, who declared the Mahdi's warriors had already advanced as far as Assuan, for Stasch disputed this, and Idris had long noticed that the white boy knew more than all of them. However, he supposed that beyond the first cataract, where the people were more savage and less under the influences of the

124 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

English people and the Egyptian Government, more secret believers in the prophet were to be found, who if necessary would help them and supply them with provisions and camels. But the Bedouins had calculated that they were still about five days' journey from Assuan.

The way led through still more desolate country, and at every halt the provisions for man and beast sank lower.

Fortunately, they could drive the camels on, and make them gallop as fast as they pleased, for the heat had not exhausted the animals' strength. In the daytime, during the noon hours, the sun beat down fiercely upon them, but the air was always fresh and the nights so cool that Stasch, with Idris' permission, mounted Nell's camel to look after her health and to protect her from the cold. But his fears were groundless, for Dinah, whose eyes had greatly improved, looked carefully after her little lady.

The boy was surprised that the little one's health had not suffered, and that she stood the journey as well as he, especially when the halts were becoming less and less frequent. Sorrow and fear, and the tears which she had shed longing for papa, had apparently not done her much harm. She had perhaps become a little thin, and her pale face was tanned by the wind, but as time went on she stood the journey better than in the beginning. Idris had given her the best camel, and had arranged the saddle

very comfortably so that she could sleep, but it was the fresh desert air especially, breathed night and day, that gave her the strength to bear the fatigue and discomfort of the journey.

Stasch not only protected her, but he intentionally treated her with a reverence the depth of which he did not realize, notwithstanding his unusual attachment for the little one. He noticed that the Arabs also caught this attitude, and that it unconsciously strengthened their conviction that they were carrying along something exceedingly precious, an especially important prisoner, whom they had to treat most carefully. Idris had accustomed them to this before leaving Medinet, and so they all behaved well toward her. They gave her plenty of water and dates. The cruel Gebhr dared not raise his hand against her again. Perhaps the unusual beauty of the girl, and the fact that she looked somewhat like a flower or a little bird, had its effect, for even the savage and uncultivated hearts of the Arabs could not resist her charm. Sometimes, also, at the halting-places, when she stood around the fire made of Jericho roses, colored with the red light from the flames and the silvery light from the moon, the Sudanese and the Bedouins could not take their eyes off her, but murmured, according to their custom, smacking their lips as a sign of admiration:

"Allah! Maschallah! Bismillah!"

At noon the second day, after traveling that

long stretch, Stasch and Nell, who were now riding on the same camel, had a moment of intense joy. Immediately after sunrise a clear and transparent mist, which, however, soon disappeared, hovered over the desert. But when the sun rose higher the heat became greater than on the previous days. When the camels stood still for a moment there was not a breath of wind stirring, so that the air, as well as the sand, appeared to slumber in heat, light, and silence. The caravan had just reached a large level plain, unbroken by ravines, when suddenly a wonderful sight presented itself before the children. Groups of slim palms and pepper-trees, orange plantations, white houses, a small mosque with a towering minaret and broad walls, surrounded by gardens, appeared so plainly and so close to them that it seemed as though the caravan would be under the trees of an oasis in half an hour.

"What is that?" cried Stasch. "Nell! Nell! Look!"

As Nell raised up she was struck dumb with surprise, but soon after she cried out with joy:

"Medinet! To papa! To papa!"

But Stasch became pale with emotion.

"In fact—that may be Chargeh. But no! It must be Medinet. I remember the minaret and I even see the windmill on the well."

And in reality in the distance were distinctly seen the tall windmills of American wells, re-

sembling large white stars. These stood out so clearly on the green background of the trees that Stasch's sharp eye could discern the red-painted edges of the spokes of the windmills.

"That is Medinet!"

Stasch had read in books that in the desert there is an optical illusion known as a "mirage," and that travelers sometimes see oases, towns, rows of trees, and lakes that are not real, but are produced by atmospheric conditions, which, due to the reflection of light, cause far-distant objects to appear as if nearby. But this time the apparition was so distinct that it seemed as if it could be touched, and although he knew it must be an illusion, he could not doubt that he was looking at the real Medinet. There was the little tower on the house of the Moodir, the round-shaped passage just under the top of the minaret, where the muezzin calls the faithful to prayers; there were the familiar groups of trees, and especially the windmills! No, this must be the real place. It occurred to the boy that perhaps the Sudanese, after thinking things over, had come to the conclusion that they would not be able to escape their pursuers, and, without having told him, were returning to Fayoum. But they were so composed that he doubted if this were so. If it were really Fayoum, would they look at it with such indifference? For they saw the apparition, too, and pointed it out to one another, but their faces portrayed no uncertainty

or anxiety. Stasch looked at it again, and perhaps it was this indifference on the part of the Arabs which made the picture appear to fade before him. He also thought that if they were really returning, the people, being frightened, would have kept closer together. The Bedouins, who by Idris' orders had for several days ridden on in advance, could no longer be seen, and Chamis, who brought up the rear, looked in the distance no larger than a hawk flying along the ground.

"The mirage!" said Stasch to himself.

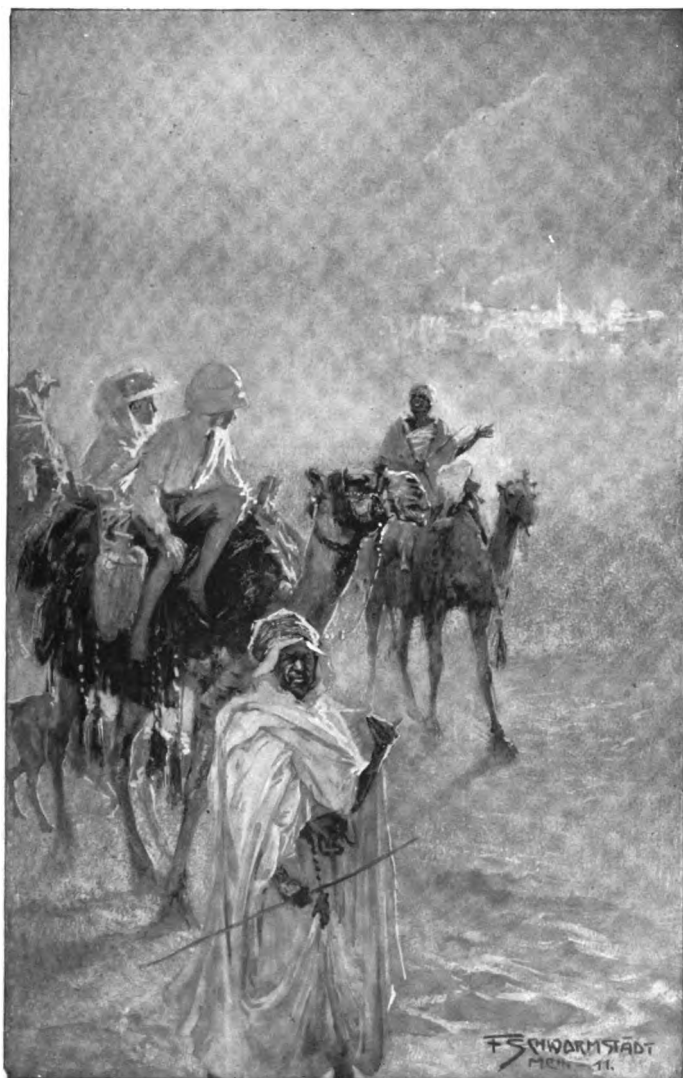
Meanwhile Idris approached and cried out to him:

"Hoh! Drive the camel on! Don't you see Medinet?"

He appeared to be jesting and spoke in such a scornful tone that the very faintest shadow of hope that this might be Medinet lying before him vanished from the boy's heart.

Sadly he turned to Nell to dispel her illusion when something suddenly happened which turned the attention of all in another direction.

At first one of the Bedouins came galloping up fast toward them, and while still at a distance began to gesticulate with a long Arabian gun that did not belong to any one in the caravan. When he reached Idris he exchanged a few hasty words with him; then the caravan turned toward the interior of the desert. After a while the second Bedouin appeared, leading a fat camel with a saddle on its hump and



“Idris approached and cried out to him. . . . ‘Don’t you see Medinet?’ He spoke in such a scornful tone that all hope vanished from the boy’s heart.”—PAGE 128.

leather bags hanging down from his flanks. Again a short conversation took place, but Stasch could not catch a word of it. The caravan rode quickly without a stop toward the west, and only halted when it reached a narrow ravine full of broken rocks and caves. One of these was so spacious that the Sudanese were able to place all the people and camels in it. Although Stasch thought he knew what had happened, he lay down next to Idris and pretended to go to sleep, hoping that the Arabs, who had scarcely spoken a word about their adventure until now, would soon begin to talk about it. His hopes were well founded, for soon after, having scattered food for the camels, the Bedouins sat down to consult with the Sudanese and Chamis.

"From now on we must ride only by night and hide in the daytime," the one-eyed Bedouin said. "In future we will come across many ravines, and in these we can conceal ourselves securely."

"Are you sure that it was a guard?" asked Idris.

"Allah! We spoke to him. It was good that he was alone. He stood concealed behind a rock so that we could not see him, but we heard the camel's voice from a distance. Then we slackened our pace and rode so softly that he saw us only when we were a few steps off. He was very much frightened, and tried to point his gun at us. If he had fired, even if he

had not killed one of us, the other guards would have heard the shot, and so I said to him quickly: 'Stop! We are pursuing people who have carried off two white children, and soon all our company will be here.' The fellow was young and stupid; and so he believed us—though he made us swear by the Koran that we were telling the truth. We dismounted from the camels and swore. The Mahdi will forgive us."

"And bless you," said Idris. "Tell us what you did."

"When we had sworn," continued the Bedouin, "I said to the young man: 'But who can prove to us that you yourself do not belong to the thieves who are fleeing with the white children and have left you here to hold up the pursuers?' I bade him to swear, too, which he did, and he believed us all the more. We began to question him, asking what orders had come from the sheiks along the copper wire, and whether the thieves were being pursued in the desert. He replied in the affirmative, and said that they had been promised great rewards; also that all ravines at a distance of two days' journey from the river were guarded, and that there were large baburis (steamers) filled with Englishmen and soldiers continually passing up and down the river."

"Neither ships nor soldiers are of any avail against the power of Allah and the prophet."

"It is as you say!"

"And now tell us how you made way with that fellow?"

The one-eyed Bedouin pointed to his companion.

"Abu Anga," he said, "then asked him if there were no other guards nearby, and on his replying in the negative, he suddenly drove his knife into his throat, so that the latter never uttered a sound. We threw him into a deep hollow and covered him up with stones and thorns. In the village they will think that he has fled to the Mahdi, for he told us that such things have happened."

"May God bless those who flee, as he has blessed us," answered Idris.

"Yes, we have been blessed!" answered Abu Anga. "For now we know we must keep three days' journey away from the river, and besides that we have captured a gun, which we needed, and also a camel to milk."

"The bags," added the one-eyed man, "are filled with water, and there is a fair amount of millet in the saddle bags, but we did not find much powder."

"Chamis has several hundred cartridges, which belong to this white boy's gun, which we don't know how to shoot. But the powder is the same and it will also do for our gun."

Still Idris became thoughtful as he heard these words, and a very troubled look was imprinted on his dark face, for he realized that as one had already been killed, even Stasch's

intervention could not protect them from being punished, in case they should now fall into the hands of the Egyptian Government.

Stasch listened attentively with beating heart. This conversation seemed like good news to him, and he was especially glad to hear that parties had been sent out to hunt for them, that rewards had been offered, and that the sheiks of the tribes along the banks had received orders to hold up all caravans traveling south. The boy was also greatly pleased on hearing about the ships which steamed up stream with the English soldiers. The Dervishes of the Mahdi could fight well with the Egyptian army, and even defeat them, but with the English it was quite different, and Stasch did not doubt a minute that the first battle would end in the savage tribes being completely defeated. Thus he consoled himself with the thought that even if they were taken to the Mahdi, there was a possibility that before they got there the Mahdi or the Dervishes might be wiped out. But he did not feel so much comforted when he thought that in this case a journey of a whole week still lay before them, which would at least exhaust Nell's strength, and that during all that time they would be in the company of these villains and murderers.

When Stasch thought of the young Arab whom the Bedouins had slaughtered like a sheep, he felt very much frightened and sad. He decided not to say anything about it to

Nell, for fear that it might terrify her and increase the sadness she had felt on seeing the illusive pictures of the oasis Fayoum and the town Medinet disappear. Before they had reached the ravine he saw that her eyes were filled with tears. And so, when he had gotten all the information he wanted out of the story, he pretended to awake, and went to Nell. She was sitting in a corner next to Dinah eating dates, which she moistened a little with her tears. When she saw Stasch she remembered that not long ago he had praised her behavior as being that of a girl at least thirteen years old, so she clenched a date-stone with all her might between her teeth, to help her control her sobs, that she would not seem like a child again.

"Nell," said the boy, "Medinet was an illusion, but I know for certain that we are being followed, so don't worry any more and don't cry any more."

On hearing this the girl raised her tear-stained eyes to him, and answered in broken phrases:

"No, Stasch! I do not want to cry—only my eyes—perspire so——"

At the same moment her chin began to quiver, large tears fell from beneath her closed lids, and she burst out crying. But being ashamed of these tears, and expecting Stasch to reprove her for shedding them, she hid her little head for shame and fear on Stasch's

breast and thus completely moistened his clothes.

He now began to console her:

"Nell, do not be a fountain! Did you see that they have taken a gun and a camel away from some Arab? Do you know what that means? It means that the desert is full of guards. These wretches have succeeded in surprising a guard this time, but the next time they will be caught themselves. Several steamers are keeping watch on the Nile! Of course, Nell, we shall return home, and on a steamer, too. Fear nothing!——"

He would have consoled her still longer in this way if a peculiar sound ringing out of the center of the flying sand, which the last hurricane had blown into the ravine, had not attracted his attention. This sound somewhat resembled the thin metallic music of a whistle. Stasch interrupted the conversation and began to listen. Soon afterward similar sounds, thin and sad, could be heard coming from various directions at once. An idea occurred to the boy that perhaps Arabian guards had surrounded the ravine and were making signals to one another by means of whistles. His heart began to beat. He repeatedly looked at the Sudanese, in the hope of seeing fear on their faces, but in vain. Idris, Gebhr, and the two Bedouins calmly chewed zwieback. Chamis was the only one who appeared surprised, and the sounds continued. After a while Idris got up and

looked out of the cave; then he returned, stopped in front of the children, and said:

"The sand is beginning to sing."

Stasch was so curious that for the moment he forgot his resolution not to speak to Idris again, and asked:

"The sand? What does that mean?"

"It often happens; and it means that there will be no more rain for a long time. But the heat will not harm us, for until we reach Assuan we shall ride only by night."

And he would say no more. Stasch and Nell listened for some time to these peculiar sounds, which lasted until the sun went down in the west. Then night came on and the caravan continued on its journey.

CHAPTER XII

DURING the day they secreted themselves in places difficult of access, in the midst of cliffs and rocks, and during the night they hurried on without stopping, until they had passed the first cataract, when at last the Bedouins recognized, from the position and shape of the khor, that Assuan now lay behind them. With this a heavy weight fell from Idris' shoulders. As they were now suffering for lack of water, they approached to within half a day's journey of the river. After Idris had secreted the caravan for the following night, he sent all the camels with the Bedouins to the Nile, so that they

could drink enough to last for some time. The fertile zone along the Nile becomes narrower after leaving Assuan. In some places the desert reaches to the river. The villages are some distance apart, and thus the Bedouins were able to return safely, having been perceived by no one, and with a plentiful supply of water. Now the only question was how to obtain food, for their animals had had so little to eat this last week that they had become very thin. Their necks were long, their humps sunken in, and their feet weak. The maize and other food for the party could at a stretch last only two days longer. But Idris was of the opinion that at the end of two days' journey, though traveling only by night, they might approach the pastures near the river, and perhaps be able to buy dates and zwieback in some village.

Saba received absolutely nothing more to eat or drink; the children saved some scraps for him, but he knew how to help himself out in some way, for he arrived at the halting-places with a bloody throat and traces of bites on his neck and chest. Whether the spoils of these fights were jackals or hyenas, or perhaps even sand-foxes and gazels, no one ever knew; it sufficed that he did not appear to be very hungry. Sometimes also his black lips were wet, as if he had drunk. The Bedouins supposed that he had dug deep holes in the ground of the ravines and in this manner had reached water that he had scented through the ground.

Sometimes lost travelers dig up the broken earth, and if they do not always find water, they nearly always come upon wet sand, and by sucking the water out of it quench their painful thirst.

But a great change had also come over Saba. His chest and neck were still strong, but his flanks were sunken in, which made him look taller. His bloodshot eyes had a savage and threatening look. But to Nell and Stasch he was as devoted as ever, and let them do what they liked with him; he wagged his tail at Chamis now and then, but at the Bedouins and Sudanese he barked, showed his terrible fangs, and ground his teeth like iron nails. Thus Idris and Gebhr began to be afraid of him, and they hated him so that they would probably have shot him with the gun they had captured if the desire of bringing Smain such a rare specimen of an animal, and the fact that they had already left Assuan behind them, had not held them back.

Assuan lay behind them! Stasch continually thought of this, and it slowly dawned upon him that there was great doubt of the searchers overtaking them. It is true, he knew that not only the so-called Egypt—which ends below Wadi Halfa, that is, in the vicinity of the second cataract—but also the whole of Nubia, was at this time in the hands of the Egyptian Government, and he also realized that on the other side of Assuan, and especially below Wadi

188 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Halfa, it would be more difficult to search for them, and the orders of the government would be less promptly executed. However, he still cherished the hope that his father and Mr. Rawlison, after having organized the search, would go alone by steamer from Fayoum to Wadi Halfa, and from there, after having obtained from the government soldiers mounted on camels, would try to bar the way of the caravan from the southern side. The boy calculated that he would do this if he were so situated, and so he considered that he had a good foundation for his supposition.

He did not give up the thought of attempting to escape. The Sudanese wanted powder for the gun they had captured, and to get it they decided to tear open a number of cartridges; so he told them that he only could do it, and that if one of them went clumsily at it the cartridge would explode and tear off his hand. Idris, who was usually afraid of strange things and English discoveries, in the end decided to trust this work to the boy. Stasch was glad to do it, because he hoped that the strong English powder would burst the old Arabian gun at the first shot, and he also hoped to be able to secrete a few cartridges. He found this easier than he thought. He was watched while he did it, but the Arabs began to talk among themselves, and they were soon paying more attention to their conversation than to him. This talkativeness and inborn carelessness at last permitted Stasch

to hide seven cartridges in his breast pocket. Now it was only a case of gaining possession of the rifle.

The boy believed that this would not be very difficult beyond Wadi Halfa, after the second cataract, for he supposed that the watchfulness of the Arabs would slacken in proportion as they approached their destination. The thought that he would have to kill the Bedouins, the Sudanese, and even Chamis still filled him with terror, but after the murder which the Bedouins had committed he had no more scruples. He said to himself that after all it was a matter of Nell's defense, of her freedom, and of her life, that therefore he ought not to spare the lives of their enemies, especially if they would not surrender and a fight should result. The question was now how to obtain the gun. Stasch decided to take it by strategy if he found a suitable opportunity—not to wait till they reached Wadi Halfa, but to execute his intention as soon as possible. And he did not wait.

Two days had now elapsed since they passed Assuan, and at last, at daybreak of the third day, Idris was obliged to send the Bedouins for food, which was now very scarce. Stasch, when he considered that he now had fewer opponents, said to himself, "Now or never!" and immediately turned to the Sudanese with the question:

"Idris, do you know that the country beginning at Wadi Halfa is Nubia?"

140 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"I know it. I was fifteen and Gebhr eight years old when our fathers brought us from the south to Fayoum, and I remember that at that time we traveled all through Nubia on camels. But this country still belongs to the Turks (Egyptians).

"Yes, the Mahdi is only at Khartum—you see how stupidly Chamis talked when he told you that the army of the Dervishes extended as far as Assuan. But I should like to ask you another question. I have read in books that in Nubia there are many wild animals and thieves, who are no good to any one and who attack the Egyptians as well as the faithful followers of the Mahdi. How will you defend yourselves if wild animals or thieves attack you?"

Stasch purposely exaggerated when speaking of wild animals, but, on the other hand, since the beginning of the war attacks by robbers had become quite frequent, especially in the southern parts of the country bordering on Sudan.

Idris considered the question a while, for he was not prepared to answer it because he had not previously thought of these new dangers; then he said:

"We have knives and a gun."

"A gun like yours is of no use."

"I know it. Yours is better, but we do not understand it, and we shall not give it into your hands."

"Even if it is not loaded?"

"Yes, for it might be bewitched."

Stasch raised his eyebrows.

"Idris, if Gebhr had said this I should not have been surprised; but you—I thought you had more sense! With an unloaded gun even the Mahdi could not shoot."

"Be silent!" interrupted Idris angrily. "The Mahdi can shoot with nothing but his fingers."

"Then *you* shoot like that yourself."

The Sudanese gazed questioningly into the boy's eyes.

"Why do you want me to give you the gun?"

"I will teach you how to shoot with it."

"What good will that do?"

"A great deal, for if thieves attack us they might kill all of us! But if you are afraid of the gun or even of me, then let the matter drop."

Idris remained silent. He was really afraid, though he did not want to own it. But he was very anxious to become acquainted with the English weapon, for possessing it and knowing how to use it would give him higher standing in the camp of the Mahdists—besides which he could more readily defend himself in case of an attack.

So after considering a while he said:

"All right. Chamis shall give us the gun and you can take it out of the case."

Chamis followed out the order in a half-hearted way, and Gebhr could offer no opposition because he was busy nearby with the

142 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

camels. With trembling hands outstretched, Stasch took the barrel, then the butt, and handed them to Idris.

"You see that it is empty," he said.

Idris took the barrel and looked through it into the air.

"Yes, there is nothing in it."

"Now pay attention," said Stasch; "this is the way the gun is put together"—and at the same time he put the butt and the barrel together—"and this is the way it is opened. Do you see? I shall now take it apart, and then you may put it together again."

The Sudanese, who followed Stasch's movements very attentively, tried to do likewise, but he did not find it very easy; however, as the Arabs are generally noted for their great dexterity, the gun was put together after a while.

"Open it," said Stasch.

Idris opened the gun without any trouble.

"Close it."

This was done still more easily.

"Now give me two empty cartridges. I will teach you how to put them in."

The Arabs had kept the empty cartridges, and so Idris handed two of them to Stasch, and the lesson began again.

The Sudanese at first became frightened at the noise which the cartridges made, but at last he was convinced that one can not shoot with the empty barrel of a gun or with empty cartridges. Besides his confidence in Stasch

also returned, because the boy gave him the weapon to hold in his hands every few seconds.

"So," said Stasch, "you can put the gun together, you can open, shut, point, and pull the trigger, but you must also learn how to take aim, and that is the most difficult of all. Take an empty water-bag and set it down a hundred paces away—there, on one of those stones, and then come back to me. I will show you how to take aim."

Idris did not hesitate, but took a leather bag and started to set it up on the designated stone. Before he had gone the first hundred paces Stasch had drawn out the empty cartridges and replaced them with charged ones. Stasch's heart and temples began to throb so violently that he thought his head would split. The decisive moment had come—the moment of freedom for Nell and himself—the terrible and longed-for moment of victory!

Now Idris' life was in his hands. One pull on the trigger and the traitor who carried off Nell would fall dead. But Stasch, in whose veins flowed Polish and French blood, suddenly felt that nothing in the world could tempt him to shoot one whose back was toward him. For ought he not at least have the privilege of turning around and looking death in the face? And what would happen then? Then Gebhr would come running up, and before he had taken ten steps he, too, would lie writhing in

144 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the sand. Then there was Chamis, but the latter would lose his head, and even if he did not Stasch would have time to reload the gun. When the Bedouins returned they would find the three bodies and they themselves would meet their deserts. All that remained to be done would be to guide the camels toward the river.

These thoughts raced through Stasch's head like a whirlwind. He felt that the deed to be committed in a few seconds was most terrible, but at the same time most necessary. Pride of victory battled in his breast with feelings of horror and distaste of the means necessary for mastery. He hesitated only a moment when he remembered the tortures that white prisoners had suffered; and at the thought of his father, of Mr. Rawlison, of Nell, and of Gebhr, who had beaten the girl with the scourge, he became more bitter against them. "It must be! It must be!" he cried through his clenched teeth, and his unalterable resolution showed in his face, which was now set as if carved out of flint.

Meanwhile Idris had laid the leather bag down on a stone a hundred feet off and turned around. Stasch saw his smiling face and tall figure on the flat, sandy plain. For the last time the thought flashed through his mind that this man, now living, would shortly fall to earth and grovel in the sand in his death agony. But the boy hesitated no longer, and when Idris

was fifty feet nearer he slowly lifted the weapon to his cheek.

But before he had time to place his finger on the trigger a loud voice was heard in the direction of the sand-dunes several hundred feet away, and at the same moment about twenty riders on horses and camels appeared on the plain. Idris was struck dumb at the sight; Stasch was no less surprised, but his surprise was soon changed to the greatest joy. At last these must be the people sent in search of them, for whom they had waited so long! Yes, it must be! Doubtless the Bedouins had been captured in the village, and had confessed where the caravan was hidden. Idris must have had the same idea, for after recovering from his first fright he came running up to Stasch, his face pale with terror, and kneeling at his feet, repeated in a gasping voice:

“Sir, remember that I have been good to you! I have been good to the little Biut.”

Stasch mechanically took the cartridges out of the gun and gazed at the riders, who galloped up to them as quickly as their animals could carry them, and with cries of joy tossed their long Arabian guns in the air and caught them again most dexterously while the animals were still galloping. In the clear, transparent light they could be distinctly seen. At their head galloped two Bedouins, who were gesticulating most violently with their hands and burnouses.

146 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

In a few minutes the whole company reached the caravan. Several of the riders sprang off the horses and camels; others remained in their saddles continually shouting. But all that could be understood were two words: "Khartum! Gordon! Gordon! Khartum!"

One of the Bedouins, whom his companion called Abu Anga, at last rushed up to Idris, who was crouching at Stasch's feet, and cried:

"Khartum has fallen! Gordon is dead! The Mahdi is triumphant!"

Idris stood up, but did not believe his ears.

"And these people?" he asked, his lips trembling.

"These people were supposed to capture us, but now they are going to accompany us to the prophet."

Everything grew dark before Stasch's eyes.

CHAPTER XIII

THE last hope of escaping during the journey had entirely disappeared. Stasch knew that nothing he could think of would now be of any avail; he realized that the searching parties would not overtake them, and that if they survived the fatigue of the journey, they would reach the Mahdi and be surrendered to Smain. His only comforting thought was that they were being carried off for Smain to exchange them for his children. But when would that take place, and what would they have to

endure beforehand? What terrible fate awaited them in the midst of a bloodthirsty, savage tribe? Whether Nell would be able to stand the fatigue and privations no one could tell. On the other hand, it was certain that the Mahdi and his Dervishes hated Christians and Europeans; and so in the boy's heart there arose a fear as to whether Smain's influence would be powerful enough to protect them against defamation, mistreatment, cruelty, and the rage of the Mahdists, who murdered even Mohammedans who were loyal to the government. For the first time since they were carried off Stasch gave himself up to despair, and a somewhat superstitious expectation that misfortune was following them took possession of him. For was not the idea of carrying them off from Fayoum and bringing them to Khartum in itself perfect madness, that only stupid and savage people like Idris and Gebhr would entertain, because they did not consider that they had to travel thousands of kilometers in a land that was under Egyptian, or, more strictly speaking, under English, control? If things had gone as they naturally should, they would have been found the very next day; as things were, they were now in the vicinity of the second cataract. None of the other caravans sent to search for them had overtaken them, and the members of the last one which might have held them up had even joined their kidnappers and placed themselves at their ser-

148 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

vice. Stasch's despair, and his anxiety as to what would be the fate of little Nell, was augmented by his feeling of humiliation that up to this time none of his plans had succeeded, and what was worse, that he could not devise new ones, for even though the gun and cartridges had been returned to him, he could not shoot down all the Arabs now in the caravan.

These thoughts troubled him all the more because deliverance had been so very near. If Khartum had not fallen, or had fallen only a few days later, the same people who had now gone over to the Mahdi's side would have captured the kidnappers and delivered them over to the government. Stasch, sitting behind Idris on the camel and listening to their conversation, soon convinced himself that this would certainly have been the course; for no sooner had they started on again than the leader of the pursuing party began to tell Idris what had caused them to betray the Khedive. They had known that a large army, not Egyptian, but English, under command of General Wolseley, had gone toward the south to fight against the Dervishes. They had seen a number of boats which the terrible English had taken from Assuan to Wadi Halfa, where a railroad was being built to convey their soldiers as far as Abu Hammed. For some time all sheiks on the banks of the Nile—those who remained true to the government as well as those who secretly sympathized with the Mahdi—

were convinced that the destruction of the Der-vishes and of their prophet was inevitable, for no one had ever conquered the English.

"Allah Akbar!" interrupted Idris, as he raised his hands in the air, "and yet they have been conquered!"

"No!" replied the leader. "The Mahdi let the Dschalno, Berbers, and Dadschim tribes and thirty thousand of his best warriors commanded by Musa, the son of Helu, take the field against them. At Abu Klea a terrible battle was fought, in which God gave the victory to the unbelievers. Musa, the son of Helu, fell, and only a small remnant of his army returned to the Mahdi. The souls of the rest are in Paradise and their bodies lie in the sand, awaiting the day of resurrection. The news of this battle was soon spread along the banks of the Nile. Then we thought that the English would advance further south and release Khartum. The people cried 'The end! The end!' Meanwhile it pleased God to make other plans."

"How? What has happened?" asked Idris, feverishly excited.

"What has happened?" continued the leader, his face beaming. "Meanwhile, the Mahdi took Khartum, and during the battle Gordon's head was cut off, and as the English were only interested in Gordon, when they heard of his death they returned to the north again. Allah! We saw ship-loads of soldiers going up the

150 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

river, but we did not know what that meant. The English naturally only spread good news; bad news they keep to themselves. Therefore some of our party said that the Mahdi had fallen. But in the end the truth came to light. It is a fact that this land where we are still belongs to the government. In Wadi Halfa, and as far south as the third and perhaps the fourth cataract, the Khedive's soldiers may still be seen, but now that the English have retreated we firmly believe that the Mahdi will conquer not only Nubia and Egypt, Mecca and Medina, but the whole world. And instead of taking you prisoners and giving you over to the government, we are going to accompany you to the prophet."

"So then orders have been given to capture us?"

"In every village, to all the sheiks, and at all military stations. To places that could not be reached by the copper wire along which the orders from Cairo were sent, policemen were ordered to make the announcement that whoever captured you would receive a reward of a thousand pounds. Maschallah! That is a large fortune! A large one!"

Idris looked suspiciously at the speaker.

"And you prefer the blessing of the Mahdi?"

"Yes, and besides, he has captured so much spoil and so much money in Khartum that he shovels out Egyptian pounds by the bagful and divides it among the faithful——"

"But if the Egyptian soldiers are still in Wadi Halfa, and further south, they may capture us on the road."

"No! But we must be quick, before they get their bearings; for since the English have retreated they all have lost their senses, sheiks loyal to the government as well as the soldiers and police. Every one believes that the Mahdi will appear at any minute, and so those of us who are secretly his followers are fleeing to him; no one hinders us, for there is so much confusion that no one gives orders, and no one knows whom to obey."

"Yes, that is so!" answered Idris. "But you were right in saying that we must hurry, before they recover their senses, for it is still quite a distance to Khartum——"

Stasch, who had carefully listened to this whole conversation, felt a momentary feeble ray of hope flickering in his heart. If the Egyptian soldiers are still occupying several places in Nubia along the banks of the Nile, then—as the English had taken all the ships with them—they must get beyond reach of the tribes of the Mahdi by going along the road. And in this case it might happen that the caravan would meet the retreating soldiers and be surrounded by them. Stasch also calculated that it would take a much longer time for the news of the capture of Khartum to reach the Arabian tribes living to the north of Wadi Halfa, especially as the Egyptian Government

and the English were trying to keep their defeat a secret; so he supposed that the lawlessness that must have taken place at first among the Egyptians must be quite over by this time. It never occurred to the inexperienced boy that the fall of Khartum and the death of Gordon would occupy the attention of the people to the exclusion of everything else, and that the sheiks loyal to the government and the local officials would now have other things to do than to think of the deliverance of two white children. In fact, the Arabs who joined their caravan had not the least fear of being pursued. Though they traveled very rapidly and did not spare the camels, they remained near the Nile, and often at night they turned toward the river to water the animals and to fill the leather bags. Sometimes they even risked riding into the villages in broad daylight. Nevertheless, to make things doubly safe, they sent several people in advance to reconnoiter, who made an excuse of buying provisions, to find out the news of the district—whether all the Egyptian soldiers had left the neighborhood and whether the inhabitants were partisans of the Turks (Egyptians). When they came upon a place whose inhabitants secretly sympathized with the Mahdi, the whole caravan rode into the village, and it often happened that when the caravan left the place it was joined by several young Arabs desirous of fleeing to the Mahdi.

Idris also learned that nearly all the Egypt-

tian detachments were in the Nubian desert, and therefore on the right, the eastern side of the Nile; and to prevent meeting them they would be obliged to follow the left bank and go around the larger towns and settlements. That lengthened the journey, for the river beginning at Wadi Halfa makes an enormous curve, which at first stretches out far toward the south and then turns off toward the northeast as far as Abu Hammed, where it takes a more southerly direction; but, on the other hand, this left bank, especially south of the oasis of Selimeh, was practically unguarded, and the Sudanese found the journey quite pleasant, owing to their increased numbers, and the plentiful supply of food and water. After the third cataract was passed there was no need to hurry, and so they rode only by night, hiding themselves during the day between the hills or in the ravines. Now a cloudless sky hung over them, gray and quiet on the horizon and in the middle vaulted like a large dome. Every day they advanced toward the south the heat became more and more unbearable, and even in the narrow passes and through the deepest shade the heat beat down upon the caravan. But to offset this the nights were very cold, and the heavens were sprinkled with shining stars that seemed to cluster in large and small groups. Stasch noticed that they were not the same constellations as those in Port Said. He had dreamed one day of seeing the southern

154 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

cröss, and now he really saw it behind El-Ordeh, and its light only prophesied misfortune for him. For several evenings the pale twinkling of the somber zodiacal stars lighted up the west side of the heavens for some time after the sun had set.

CHAPTER XIV

Two weeks after leaving the district of Wadi Halfa the caravan entered the land that had been conquered by the Mahdi. They galloped over the hilly desert of El-Gesireh (Dschesirah) and in the vicinity of Schendi, where the English had previously inflicted a crushing defeat upon Musa's army, they crossed a district which in nowise resembled a desert. Here there were no sand plains or hillocks. As far as the eye could reach extended a steppe of partly green grass and jungle, where grew groups of the prickly acacias that yield the well-known Sudanese rubber. Here and there they came across enormous trees with such wide-spreading branches that a hundred people could take shelter from the sun under them. From time to time the caravan passed high, pillar-like hills covered with ants, which grow all over equatorial Africa. The green of the pastures and acacias, after the monotonous dull color of the desert sand, was more than grateful to the eye. Here Stasch and Nell for the first time beheld enormous

zizyphus¹ trees and equally large oaks. They also saw large dog-headed baboons, that on catching sight of Saba showed their anger by their quick motions and by snarling, but did not venture to attack him.

In places where the steppe somewhat resembled a meadow a great many camels grazed, guarded by armed warriors of the Mahdi. At the sight of the caravan the guards jumped up like birds of prey, ran toward them, hemmed them in on all sides, and shaking their spears and crying aloud, questioned them as to where they came from, why they were coming from the north, and where they were going. Sometimes they assumed such a threatening manner that Idris was obliged to answer the questions at once to avoid being attacked.

Stasch, who had supposed that the only difference between the inhabitants of Sudan and the Arabs living in Egypt consisted in their belief in the Mahdi, and their unwillingness to recognize the authority of the Khedive, found that he had been greatly mistaken. Most of those who now constantly held up the caravan had a darker complexion than Idris and Gebhr, and, compared with the Bedouins, seemed almost black. There was more negro than Arabian blood in their veins. Their faces and the upper parts of their bodies were tattooed in various designs or with phrases from the

¹ *Zizyphus Spina Christi*, a spiny and usually small shrub, sometimes called the jujube-tree.

Koran. Some of them were almost naked, others wore "Dschubis," or coats of white woolen texture, finished off with colored patches. Many had branches of coral or pieces of ivory drawn through their noses, lips, and ears. The chiefs covered their heads with white caps, of the same material as their coats. The ordinary soldiers were bareheaded, but their skulls were not shaven like those of the Arabs of Egypt; on the contrary, they were covered with coarse, disheveled hair, which was often colored red and almost burned up by the chalk with which it was rubbed as a protection against vermin. Their weapons were mostly spears, which they could wield with fatal dexterity, and they had plenty of Remington rifles, captured in their victorious battles with the Egyptian army, and also after the fall of Khartum. On the whole, their appearance was enough to frighten any one. Their behavior toward the caravan was hostile, for they suspected that it was made up of Egyptian merchants, whom the Mahdi had, directly after the victory, forbidden to enter Sudan. While they surrounded the caravan they screamed and brandished their spears at the breasts of the men, or pointed the barrels of their guns at them, whereupon Idris' voice arose above their shrieks; he told them that he and his brother belonged to the Dangali tribe, the same to which the Mahdi belonged, and that they were taking the white children as prisoners to the

prophet. This alone withheld the savages from laying violent hands on them. When at last Stasch fully realized this terrible truth, his heart was heavy at the thought of what they still had to look forward to during the days that were to follow. Even Idris, who had lived for years in a civilized land, could not imagine anything more dreadful; and he was glad when an armed division of the Emir Nur-el-Tadhil surrounded their caravan one evening and took them to Khartum.

Before Nur-el-Tadhil had fled to the Mahdi he had been an officer in one of the Khedive's negro regiments, and since he was not so savage as the other Mahdists, Idris was better able to get along with him. But even here he was doomed to be disappointed. He had imagined that his arrival with white children in the camp of the Mahdi would, in consideration of the terrible fatigue and the dangers of the journey, arouse admiration. He hoped that the Mahdists would receive him enthusiastically and lead him in triumph to the prophet, and that the latter would lavish gold and praise upon him who had rendered such service to his relative, Fatima. But the Mahdists brandished their spears against the caravan, while Nur-el-Tadhil listened languidly to the description of the journey. When at last he was asked if he knew Smain, the husband of Fatima, he said: "No; in Omdurman and Khartum there are more than a hundred thousand warriors, so it is

impossible for them to know one another; even all the officers are not acquainted. The kingdom of the prophet is exceedingly large and therefore many emirs rule over the distant towns in the districts of Sennaar, Kordofan, Darfur, and near Fashoda. It may be that this Smain of whom you speak is not in the neighborhood of the prophet just now."

Idris felt rather hurt by the disdainful tone with which Nur spoke of "this Smain," and so he answered rather impatiently:

"Smain is married to a cousin of the Mahdi, and thus Smain's children are relatives of the prophet."

"The Mahdi has many relatives and can not remember them all."

For a while they rode on in silence, then Idris again asked:

"When shall we arrive in Khartum?"

"Before midnight," answered Tadhil, looking at the stars, which began to appear on the western side of the heavens.

"Shall I be able to get provisions and fodder at such a late hour? We have not eaten anything since our noon-day rest."

"You may sleep and eat at my house to-night, but to-morrow, in Omdurman, you must provide your own food, and I warn you in advance it will not be very easy."

"Why?"

"On account of the war. The people have not cultivated the fields in many years, but have

lived on meat, and when the cattle gave out a famine ensued. Throughout the entire south a famine reigns, and to-day a sack of maize costs more than a slave."

"Allah Akbar!" cried Idris, astonished. "Did I not see a great many camels and herds of cattle on the steppe?"

"Those belong to the prophet, to the nobles,¹ and the califs. Yes, the Dangalis, from whose tribe come the Mahdi, and the Baggars, whose chieftain is the chief calif Abdullah, still have herds in plenty, but life is harder and harder for the other tribes."

Here Nur-el-Tadhil tapped his stomach and said:

"In the service of the prophet I have a higher place, more money, and greater power, but in the service of the Khedive I had a larger stomach."

As he feared he might have said too much, he added:

"But this will all be a thing of the past when the true faith conquers."

When Idris heard this remark he unconsciously thought of how he, too, when in Fayoum and in the service of the English, had never suffered from hunger, and that he could easily earn money, and he became very sad.

Then he asked more questions:

"So to-morrow you will take us to Omdurman?"

¹ The Mahdi's brothers and relatives.

160 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Yes. By order of the prophet, Khartum is to be depopulated, and there are now very few people there. The larger houses are being pulled down, and the material will be taken along with the remaining spoil to Omdurman. The prophet will not live in a town that is tainted by unbelievers."

"To-morrow I shall fall at his feet, and he will have me supplied with provisions and fodder."

"Ha! If you really belong to the tribe of Dangali perhaps you may be admitted to his presence. But you must know that his house is guarded night and day by a hundred men armed with scourges, who do not spare their blows on those who attempt to reach the Mahdi without permission. Otherwise the people would not give the holy man a minute's peace."

"Allah! I myself have seen Dangalis with bloody stripes on their backs."

Every minute Idris' disappointment increased.

"So the believers," he asked, "can not see the prophet?"

"The believers see him daily at the place of prayer, when he kneels on a sheepskin and raises his hands to God, or when he teaches the people and strengthens them in their faith. But it is very difficult to be admitted to his presence and to talk to him, and whoever is allowed this happiness attracts the jealousy of every

one else, for upon him God's grace descends, blotting out his past sins."

Now suddenly it grew dark, and became piercing cold. In the ranks of the caravan the horses could be heard neighing, and the sudden change from the heat of the day to the cold was so great that the steam arose from the horses, and the party rode as through a mist. Stasch leaned over behind Idris' back toward Nell and asked:

"Are you not cold?"

"No," answered the girl, "but—there will be no one to protect us——"

Tears drowned the rest of the sentence.

Stasch was unable to find words to comfort her, for he felt convinced that they would not regain their freedom. They were now in a land of misery, of bestial cruelty, and of bloodshed. They were like two miserable little leaves in the midst of a storm, which not only brought death and destruction to individuals, but to whole towns and tribes. What hand could save two small, helpless children?

The moon slowly arose in the heavens and turned the branches of the mimosas and acacias into silver feathers. In the thick jungles sounded the shrill, joyous laughter of the hyenas, who in this bloodthirsty stretch of land found more human corpses than they could devour. From time to time the division which led the caravan met other patrols and exchanged the arranged password with them. At

last they climbed down the high banks and reached the Nile through a long ravine. The people, horses, and camels were shipped on large barges, and soon the measured sweep of the heavy oars cut the smooth surface of the water, illuminated by the light of the myriad stars.

Half an hour later lights could be seen on the southern side, toward which the boats were steering, and the nearer they approached this cluster of lights, the more brilliant was the red glow reflected on the water. Nur-el-Tadhil nudged Idris, then pointed with his hand and said:

“Khartum!”

They halted at the farther end of the town, in front of a house which formerly belonged to a rich Italian merchant, who had been killed during the attack on the town, and afterward, when the spoils were divided, the house had fallen to Tadhil's share. The wives of the emir were gentle and kind to Nell, who was nearly dead from fatigue, and although food was very scarce in Khartum, they found a few dried dates and some rice and honey for the little one; then they led the child to the top floor and put her to bed. Stasch, who spent the night in the open between the camels and horses, had to content himself with a zwieback, but he had plenty of water, for strange to say the fountain in the garden had not been destroyed. Although he was very tired, he could

not get to sleep for a long while. He was kept awake by the scorpions, which crept all night over the cloth rug on which he lay, and then again because he was deathly afraid that he might be separated from Nell and not be able to watch over her any longer. Saba, who continually sniffed around, and howled from time to time, annoying the soldiers, seemed to be equally worried. Stasch quieted him as best he could, fearing that some one might harm him. The enormous creature, however, was greatly admired by the emir and by all the Dervishes, and no one would have attempted to injure him in any way.

Nor did Idris sleep. He had felt indisposed all day, and besides this, after his talk with Nur-el-Tadhil many of his illusions had been dispelled, and he saw the future now as through a dark veil. He was glad that on the morrow they were to travel on to Omdurman, which is only separated from Khartum by the White Nile. He hoped to find Smain, but what then? During the journey everything had looked clear and distinct and so much grander to him. He frankly believed in the prophet, and his heart was drawn more toward him because they both belonged to the same tribe. But, like most Arabs, he was also greedy for gain, and ambitious. He had imagined that he would be deluged with gold, and that he would at least be made an emir, and dreamed of campaigns against the "Turks," of captured towns, and

spoils. But now, from what Tadhil had told him, he began to fear that on account of exceedingly important events that had taken place, his deeds would disappear like rain in the ocean. "Perhaps," he thought with bitter regret, "scarcely any one will pay any attention to what I have done, and Smain will not even be grateful that I have brought him these children." This thought vexed him. The approaching day would decide whether or not his fears were well founded, and he waited for it impatiently.

At six o'clock the sun rose, and the Dervishes began to bestir themselves. Shortly after Tadhil appeared and ordered them to get ready to depart. He told them also that until they reached the place where they crossed the river they would have to walk alongside of his horse.

To Stasch's great joy, Dinah brought Nell down from the top floor; then they went through the whole town, following the wall, until they came to the place where their transports were moored. Tadhil rode in front, and behind him came Stasch leading Nell by the hand; they were followed by Idris, Gebhr, and Chamis, old Dinah and Saba and thirty of the emir's soldiers. The rest of the caravan remained in Khartum.

Stasch looked around with interest. He could not understand how such a strongly fortified town—which lay in a fork made by the White Nile and the Blue Nile, and therefore

surrounded on three sides by water, and only accessible from the south—could fall. But later the Christian slaves told him that the water in the river at that time was so low that wide plains of sand were laid bare, and this made the walls much more accessible. The garrison had given up all hope of succor; the soldiers, exhausted by hunger, were unable to stem the rush of the angry tribes, and so the town was captured and the inhabitants slain. Although a month had passed since the invasion, traces of the fight could be seen all along the wall, on the inside of which towered ruined houses, which were the objects of the conquerors' first onslaught, and the moat running around the fortress was choked with corpses, which no one seemed inclined to bury.

On their way to the river-crossing Stasch counted more than four hundred bodies, which the Sudanese sun had dried up like mummies. They were all the color of gray parchment, so that one could not distinguish which were Europeans, Egyptians, or negroes. Among the corpses moved numbers of small gray lizards, which on the approach of the caravan quickly flitted behind the human remains, taking refuge either in a mouth or between the shriveled ribs.

Stasch managed to prevent Nell seeing all of this terrible sight, and succeeded in directing her attention the other way, toward the

town. But even there were scenes that filled the eyes and heart of the girl with horror.

The sight of the captured English children and of Saba, who was led on a leash by Chamis, attracted a crowd that increased every minute as the party approached the river-crossing. After a while such a mob collected that the party had to stop. On all sides threatening cries were heard. Terrible tattooed faces bent over Stasch and Nell. Most of the savages burst out laughing in derision when they saw them, beating their sides with joy; some cursed them, and others roared like wild beasts as they showed their white teeth and rolled their eyes. At last they began to threaten them and to brandish knives. Nell, half fainting from fright, clung close to Stasch, and he protected her as best he could, firmly convinced that their last hour had come. Fortunately Tadhil could no longer stand the angry crowd, and at his command some soldiers surrounded the children, while others began to beat the howling mob most mercilessly with scourges. Those in front dispersed, but still a great crowd followed the party with savage yells until they had boarded the boats.

The children breathed freely again while crossing the river. Stasch consoled Nell by telling her that when the Dervishes became accustomed to seeing them they would cease to threaten them, and he assured her that Smain would protect and defend them both, and espe-

cially her, for if anything serious were to happen to them he would have no one to exchange for his own children. That was true, but the attacks they had just encountered so terrified the girl that she seized Stasch's hand and would not let go of it for a second; at the same time she cried out over and over again in a feverish way, "I'm afraid! I'm afraid!" Stasch wished with all his heart that they would reach Smain as soon as possible, for he had known them for some time and had been very friendly to them in Port Said, or at least had feigned to be. At any rate, he was not so savage as the other Sudanese and Dangalis, and captivity in his house would be more endurable than this.

He wondered if Smain were known in Omdurman. Idris broached the subject to Nur-el-Tadhil, and the latter at last remembered that a year before, through orders given by Calif Abdullah, who lived in Kordofan, quite a distance from Khartum, he had heard of a person of that name. This Smain had taught the Dervishes how to fire the cannon captured from the Egyptians, and later had become a great slave-hunter. He gave Idris the following instructions in regard to seeing the emir:

"When you hear the sound of the umbaja¹ in the afternoon, be with the children at the place of prayer, where the prophet goes daily to inspire the faithful with an example of piety

¹ A large trumpet made of an elephant's tusk.

and to strengthen their belief. There you will see the Mahdi himself and all the nobles, also the three califs, the pashas, and the emirs, and among the emirs you can surely pick out Smain."

"What shall I do and where shall I go until the time for afternoon prayers?"

"You will remain with my soldiers."

"And you, Nur-el-Tadhil, will you leave us?"

"I must go to Calif Abdullah for my orders."

"Is he the greatest of the Califs? I come from a distance, and although I have been told the names of the leaders, I would welcome further information regarding them."

"Abdullah, my leader, is the Mahdi's sword."

"May Allah make him the son of victory!"

For a while the boats went silently along. All was still save for the sliding of the oars against the thole-pins; now and then the furious splashing of water lashed into foam by the tails of disturbed crocodiles was heard. Many of these reptiles had come up the river from the south as far as Khartum; here they found plenty of food, for the river was strewn with corpses, the bodies of those slain when the town was attacked as well as of those who had died of the diseases that raged among the Mahdists, especially among their slaves. The califs had ordered that the water should not be polluted, but this had been completely disregarded, and the bodies that the crocodiles did not deign to touch floated face downward as far as the sixth

cataract, and still farther, even as far as Barbary.

But Idris was now thinking of something else; after a while he said:

"We had nothing to eat this morning; are we to go hungry till the hour of prayer, and who will supply us with food later on?"

"You are not a slave," answered Tadhil; "you can go to the market where provisions are sold. You can get dried meat and perhaps some millet there, but you will have to pay a high price, for, as I have told you, there is a famine in Omdurman."

"And during my absence wicked people might carry off the children or kill them."

"The soldiers will guard them; or if you give one of them some money he will go and procure food for you."

This was not very acceptable advice to Idris, who much preferred accepting money to giving it; but before he answered the boats had landed.

To the children Omdurman looked quite different from Khartum, where there were brick houses several stories high, the "Moodiria" (the palace of the governor, in which the heroic Gordon fell), a church, a hospital, mission-houses, an arsenal, many military garrisons, and a number of large and small gardens with the plentiful, luxuriant vegetation of the equatorial districts, whereas Omdurman looked more like a camp of savages. The fortress, which stood on the northern side of the settle-

ment, had been destroyed by order of Gordon. As far as could be seen the town consisted only of round, ball-shaped huts of millet straw. Narrow hedges of thorns separated these little houses from one another and from the street. Only here and there were tents, which seemed to have been captured from the Egyptians. In other places a few palm mats, under a piece of dirty canvas stretched on bamboo rods, formed the entire dwelling. The inhabitants took refuge within their houses when it rained or when the heat was especially oppressive; but at other times they lived in the open air, where they made their fires, cooked their food, and lived and died. There was so much confusion in the streets that in some places the party had the greatest difficulty in passing through the crowds. Omdurman had formerly been a wretched little village, but the population was now more than twenty thousand, including the slaves. Even the Mahdi and his califs were alarmed that so many people were threatened with hunger and sickness, and expeditions were constantly sent northward to conquer the towns and districts that still remained loyal to the Egyptian Government.

At the sight of the white children the multitude occasionally shouted in a menacing manner, but did not threaten them with death as had the mob in Khartum. Perhaps the rabble did not dare do so in the immediate vicinity of the Mahdi, or they may have become accustomed to seeing

prisoners, who had all been taken to Omdurman when Khartum had fallen. But to Stasch and Nell it was a hell on earth. They beheld Europeans and Egyptians bleeding from whiplashings on their bare flesh, and all but starved, used as beasts of burden and dying under their heavy loads. They saw women and children of European birth, from homes of ease and comfort—dressed in rags and lean as ghosts, whose white faces utter wretchedness had turned black—begging for a mouthful of dried meat or a handful of maize, their starved, wild demeanor telling of terror and despair. They noted how the savages scoffed when they saw these miserable prisoners, and how they were pushed about and beaten. In every side street or little lane scenes were enacted from which the eyes turned away in horror and affright. In Omdurman a terrible epidemic of dysentery, typhoid, and smallpox prevailed. The sick, covered with sores, lay at the entrances of the huts, polluting the air. The prisoners were forced to drag through the streets the canvas-shrouded corpses of those who had just died and inter them in the sand outside of the town, where hyenas attended to the real burial. Over the town hovered flocks of vultures, whose lazy-flapping wings cast mournful shadows on the bright sand. When Stasch saw this he thought that the sooner he and Nell died the better it would be for them.

But even in this sea of misery and inhuman-

ity deeds of kindly pity occasionally blossomed like tiny pale flowers rising from a foul swamp.

In Omdurman were a number of Greeks and Copts, whom the Mahdi had spared because he had use for them. These men went around not only unmolested, but even carried on their different avocations, and some of them, especially those who had made a pretense of changing their faith, had become officials of the prophet, which made them quite important in the eyes of the wild Dervishes. One of these Greeks stopped the party and began to question the children, asking where they came from. When to his great surprise he heard that they had been carried off from Fayoum and had only just arrived, he promised to tell the Mahdi about them and to inquire after them as soon as practicable. At the same time he bent his head sorrowfully over Nell and gave each of the children a lot of wild figs and a piece of money of Marie Therese coinage. He then warned the soldiers against harming the girl in any way and went off, saying in English, "Poor little bird!"

After passing along very tortuous little streets they at last reached the market-place, which stood in the middle of the town. On the way they saw many people who had had a hand or foot amputated. These were thieves or evil-doers, who had secreted spoil. Terrible punishments were meted out by the califs and emirs to those who disobeyed the laws of the prophet, and even for small transgressions—such, for in-

stance, as smoking tobacco—the culprits were beaten until they lay bleeding and unconscious. But the califs themselves subscribed only outwardly to the rules of the prophet, while at home they did as they pleased, so that these punishments fell only on the poor, whose goods and chattels they at the same time confiscated. There was nothing left for the miserable people to do but to beg, and as there was great scarcity of food in Omdurman, they succumbed to hunger.

Therefore there were crowds of beggars at the places where provisions were sold. The first thing that attracted the attention of the children was a head stuck on the end of a bamboo rod placed in the center of the round marketplace. The face was shriveled and almost black, while the hair and beard were white as milk. One of the soldiers told Idris that this was the head of Gordon. At this Stasch was overcome with grief, indignation, and a burning desire for revenge; yet he was so frightened that the blood seemed to cease flowing in his veins. This was the fate of the hero, the fearless and blameless knight, the just and good man, who was beloved even in Sudan. And the English, who had not come to his assistance in time, but had rather withdrawn their aid, now abandoned his remains, exposed to ridicule, without giving them the honor of Christian burial. From that moment Stasch lost all faith in the English. Until now he had

174 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

naïvely believed that England, if the least wrong were done to one of her countrymen, was always ready to challenge the whole world. Until now in the depths of his soul there had always glimmered a ray of hope that, the search proving unsuccessful, English troops would be sent as far as Khartum, and even farther, to protect Mr. Rawlison's daughter. Now he knew but too well that Khartum and the whole country was in the hands of the Mahdi, and that the Egyptian Government, and England, too, would think rather of protecting themselves from further attacks than of devising means for the release of European prisoners.

He realized that he and Nell had fallen into an abyss from which there was no possible means of escape, and these thoughts, in addition to the horrors he had witnessed in the streets of Omdurman, were the last straw. His usual elasticity and energy were replaced by complete and irresistible submission to his fate and anxiety for the future. He gazed around almost languidly at the market-place and the stands, at which Idris was bargaining for food. Here the street merchants, chiefly Sudanese women and negresses, sold Dschubis (white linen smocks with different colored trimmings), acacia-rubber, hollowed-out bottle-gourds, glass beads, sulphur, and all kinds of mats. There were benches where provisions were on sale, and around these a large crowd gathered. The Mahdists bought at high prices chiefly

pieces of dried meat of domestic animals, buffaloes, antelopes, and giraffes. But there were absolutely no dates, figs, or maize. Once in a while they sold water mixed with the honey of wild bees and millet seeds soaked in an infusion of tamarinds. Idris was in despair, for he saw that the market prices were so high that he would soon spend all the money given him by Fatima for provisions, and then he would be obliged to beg. His only hope now lay in Smain. Strangely enough, at this very moment Stasch, too, relied on Smain's help.

Half an hour later Nur-el-Tadhil returned from the calif. Apparently something disagreeable had happened to him there, for he was in a very bad humor, and when Idris asked him whether he had heard anything about Smain, he answered him abruptly:

"You fool, do you suppose that the calif and I have nothing better to do than to find Smain for you?"

"What do you intend me to do now?"

"Do what you please. I have allowed you to spend the night in my house, and I have given you much good advice, and now I do not wish to hear from you again."

"All right; but where shall I find shelter for the night?"

"That is no affair of mine."

With these words he departed, taking the soldiers with him. Idris could hardly beg him to send the caravan and the Arabs who had

176 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

joined them between Assuan and Wadi Halfa, to him in the market-place. These people had only arrived at mid-day, and then it was evident that none of them knew what to do. The two Sudanese began to quarrel with Idris and Gebhr, declaring that they had imagined that they would have a very different reception, and that they had purposely been deceived. After lengthy discussions and consultations they decided to erect on the outskirts of the town tents of fir branches and bamboo, in which to seek shelter for the night, and then to wait and leave the rest to Providence.

When they had finished the tents, which did not take long to build, all the Sudanese and negroes, except Chamis, who was to prepare the evening meal, went off to the public place of prayer. It was easy to find, for crowds from all sections of Omdurman were going there. The place was spacious, bordered by a hedge of thorns and partly by a clay wall, which had just been commenced. In the center was a wooden platform, on which the prophet stood while instructing the people. On the ground, in front of the tribune, sheepskins were spread out for the Mahdi, the calif, and the more important sheiks. At the sides the flags of the Empire were hoisted. The banners fluttered in the wind and shone like large variegated flowers. The four sides of the place were lined with crowded rows of Dervishes. All around could be seen towering forests of

spears, with which nearly all the warriors were armed.

It was lucky for Idris and Gebhr, as well as for the rest of the caravan, that they were considered followers of one of the emirs, and therefore could get in the front ranks of the crowd. The arrival of the Mahdi was first announced by the far-reaching and solemn umbaja, and when he appeared sharp whistles, the beating of drums, the clattering of stones shaken in empty bottle-gourds, rang out, all combining in a most infernal racket. The people were beside themselves with enthusiasm. Some fell on their knees, others cried out as loud as they could, "Oh, you are sent from God!" "Oh, victorious one!" "Oh, merciful one!" "Oh, pitying one!" and kindred exclamations, that lasted until the Mahdi stepped into the pulpit. Then amid dead silence he raised his hands, put his thumbs in his ears, and prayed for a while. The children stood quite near and could see him very well. He was a man of middle age, singularly corpulent and bloated, and nearly black. Stasch, who was an especially quick observer, noticed that his face was tattooed and that he wore a large ivory ring in one ear. He was dressed in a white coat and had a white cap on his head; his feet were bare, for before he mounted the pulpit he had removed his red half-high shoes and left them on the sheepskins, where he was afterward going to pray. There was not the least attempt at luxury in his

dress, but occasionally the wind blew a strong and pleasing odor of sandalwood¹ from him, which the believers greedily sniffed up their noses, at the same time rolling their eyes with delight. Stasch had imagined the terrible prophet, the robber and murderer of so many thousands, to be quite a different looking person, and whilst gazing at this fat face with its mild expression and tearful eyes, and with a smile constantly hovering about the lips, he could not conceal his surprise. He thought that such a man would have the head of a hyena or a crocodile, but instead he saw before him a fat-cheeked gourd with a face like a full moon.

The prophet began his teaching. His deep and ringing voice could be heard over all the place, so that every word reached the ears of the believers. He now spoke of the punishments inflicted by God on those who do not follow the laws of the Mahdi, but instead conceal spoil, get drunk, steal, spare the enemy in war, and smoke tobacco. These crimes, he said, would result in Allah's sending down upon such sinners hunger and that sickness which honeycombs the face.² This earthly life is like a vessel with a hole in it. Riches and pleasures sink in the sand. True belief is like a cow that gives sweet milk. But Paradise is open to the victor only. Those who conquer the enemy will gain salvation. Those who die for

¹In the Orient they prepare a scented oil from sandalwood.

²The smallpox.

THROUGH THE DESERT 179

the faith will live forever and ever. Happy, a hundred times happy, are those who have already fallen——”

“We will die for the faith!” cried the people in a loud voice.

Soon after the infernal noise began again. Trumpets and drums resounded. The warriors beat sword against sword and spear against spear. The warlike enthusiasm seized every one like a flame. Some cried out, “The faith is victory!” Others, “By death to Paradise!” Then Stasch understood why the Egyptian soldiers could not resist these wild tribes.

When quiet was somewhat restored the prophet began to speak again. He told of the visions he frequently had and about the mission he had received from God. Allah had commanded him to purify the faith and to spread it over the whole world. And he said that any one not recognizing him as the Mahdi, the saviour, would be condemned to destruction. The end of the world is near, but before it comes it is the duty of the believers to conquer Egypt, Mecca, and all the lands on the other side of the sea, where the heathen dwell. That is the will of God, and nothing can change it. Much blood will still be shed, many warriors will not return to their wives and children in their tents, but no human tongue can portray the happiness of those who fall in the cause.

Then he stretched out his hands toward the assembled multitude, and closing, said:

"I, the saviour, and servant of God, bless the holy war and you warriors. I bless your fatigue, your wounds, your death. I bless the victory, and mourn for you as a father who loves you."

He burst into tears. When he left the pulpit screams and wailing rent the air. Every one wept. The two califs, Abdullah and Ali-uled-Helu, gave their arms to the Mahdi to support him, and led him to the sheepskin, on which he knelt. During this short moment Idris feverishly asked Stasch whether Smain was not among the emirs.

"No!" replied the boy, who with his sharp eyes had searched in vain for the well-known face. "I can not see him anywhere. Perhaps he fell in the attack on Khartum."

Nor could Chamis, who had known Smain in Port Said, find him. The prayers lasted a long while. The Mahdi moved his hands and legs like a circus-clown, then raised his eyes in ecstasy, while repeating: "There is God! There he is!" And as the sun was about to set he arose and walked homeward.

The children now saw with what reverence the Dervishes surrounded their prophet, for crowds followed his footsteps and scraped up the earth on which he had trodden. This led to quarrels and fights, for the people believed that this earth would secure health to the well and also cure the sick. Gradually the crowd left the place of prayer. Idris did not know what

was best to do, and he had just decided to return to the tents for the night with the children and all the baggage, when the same Greek who had given Stasch and Nell the dates and coin that morning stood before them.

"I have spoken to the Mahdi about you," he said in Arabic, "and the prophet wishes to see you."

"Thanks to Allah and to you, sir!" cried Idris. "Shall we find Smain again by the Mahdi's side?"

"Smain is in Fashoda," answered the Greek. Then he said to Stasch in English:

"Perhaps the prophet will take you under his protection, for I have done my best to get him to do so. I told him that the fame of his mercy would spread abroad throughout all the white nations. Terrible things are happening all around us, and unless you are under his protection you will surely succumb to hunger, privation, and sickness from the treatment you will receive at the hands of these madmen. But he must be kept interested in you."

"What shall I do, sir?" asked Stasch.

"When you first come into his presence, fall on your knees, and when he gives you his hand, kiss it respectfully and beseech him to take you both under his protecting wing."

Here the Greek stopped and asked:

"Do none of these people understand English?"

"No. Chamis has remained in the tent, and

182 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Idris and Gebhr only understand a few words, and the others not a word."

"That's well. Listen to what I say, for everything must be planned in advance. The Mahdi will ask you whether you are prepared to accept his faith. Immediately answer that you are prepared, and that his presence had from the first shed a peculiar light of grace upon you. Remember, a peculiar light of grace! That will flatter him and he will include you among his personal servants. Then you will have luxuries and every comfort, which will prevent you from becoming ill. But if you act differently you will endanger yourself and this poor little thing, and also me, the one who wishes you well. Do you understand?"

Stasch clenched his teeth and made no answer, but his face became rigid and his eyes had a strange light in them. The Greek, noticing this, continued:

"My boy, I know that this is a disagreeable matter, but there is nothing else to be done! All those who were spared after the bloody massacre in Khartum have accepted the faith of the Mahdi. The Catholic missionaries and nuns did not accept it, but that is a different matter. The Koran forbids the murdering of priests, and although their fate is terrible enough, yet at least they are not threatened with death. But for people of other classes that was the only means of escape. I repeat, every one accepted Mohammedanism—the

Germans, Italians, Copts, English, Greeks—even I myself.”

And although Stasch had assured him that not one in the caravan understood English, his voice sank to a whisper:

“I do not need to tell you that this step does not mean a denial of the Faith or treason or apostasy. In his soul each one remains what he was before, and God knows this. One must bend to power, if only apparently. It is a man’s duty to defend his life, and it would be madness, yes, even sin, to endanger it—and for what reason? For the mere sake of appearances, for the sake of a few words spoken, which even when you utter them you can inwardly deny. Besides, remember in your hands lies not only your own life, but also the life of your little companion, whose fate you have no right to decide. I assure you that when the time comes for God to deliver you from the hands of these people, you will have nothing with which to reproach yourself, and no one will reproach you—no more than any of us——”

While the Greek talked to the boy in this way, perhaps he deceived his own conscience, but Stasch’s silence also deceived him, for he at last mistook it for fear. So he tried to encourage the boy.

“These are the houses of the Mahdi,” he said. “He prefers staying in these wooden huts here in Omdurman rather than to live in Khartum, although he could have taken possession of

184 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Gordon's palace. Keep up your courage! Don't lose your head! Answer all questions promptly and with decision. Here they admire every form of courage. Don't imagine that the Mahdi will roar at you like a lion. No! He always smiles—even when he does not contemplate any good deeds."

As he spoke these words he called to the crowd standing before the house to make room for the "guests" of the prophet.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN they entered the room they saw the Mahdi lying on a soft couch, surrounded by his wives, two of whom were fanning him with large ostrich feathers. No one else was with him except Calif Abdullah and Calif Sherif; for the third calif, Ali-uled-Helu, was at this time forwarding soldiers to the north, to Barbary, and to Abu Hammed, places already captured by the Dervishes. When the prophet saw the newcomers he pushed aside the women and sat up on the couch. Idris, Gebhr, and the two Bedouins fell on their faces and then knelt with their hands on their chests.

The Greek made a sign to Stasch to do the same, but the boy pretended not to see this; he merely bowed, and remained standing. His face had become pale, but his eyes shone brightly, and from his whole appearance—the proud way he held up his head and his com-

pressed lips—it could readily be seen that something was uppermost in his mind, that he was no longer undecided and frightened, but that he had made a firm resolution, which nothing in the world could tempt him to break. The Greek seemed to comprehend the situation, for his face wore a very anxious expression. The Mahdi took in both children at a quick glance, and his fat face lighted up with its customary smile; then turning to Idris and to Gebhr, he asked:

“You have come from the far north?”

Idris touched the floor with his forehead.

“It is so, oh Madhi! We belong to the Dangi tribe, and therefore we have left our homes in Fayoum in order to come and kneel down before your blessed feet.”

“I saw you in the desert. It is a terrible road, but I sent an angel, who watched over you and protected you from death at the hands of unbelievers. You did not see him, but he was there watching over you.”

“We thank thee, saviour.”

“And so you have brought the children for Smain, to enable him to exchange them for his own offspring, whom the Turks are detaining together with Fatima in Port Said.”

“You only will we serve!”

“He who serves me works out his own salvation, and thereby you open the way to Paradise for yourselves. Fatima is my relative. But let me tell you that when I conquer the

whole of Egypt, then my relatives and their successors will obtain their freedom."

"Then, oh blessed one, do what you wish with the children!"

The Mahdi half closed his eyelids, opened them again, smiled good-naturedly, and beckoned to Stasch.

"Come nearer, boy!"

Stasch advanced with an energetic, soldier-like step, bowed for the second time, then straightened up stiff as the string of a bow and waited, looking directly into the eyes of the Mahdi.

"Peace be with you! Are you pleased to come to us?"

"No, prophet! We were carried away from our fathers against our wills."

This frank answer created a sensation not only for the ruler, who was accustomed to being flattered, but on the others present as well. Calif Abdullah frowned, the Greek bit his lips and began to twist his fingers; but the Mahdi never ceased smiling.

"But," he said, "on the other hand, you are now at the fountain of truth. Will you drink at this source?"

A short silence ensued, and the Mahdi, thinking that the boy had not understood the question, repeated it more plainly.

"Will you accept my teaching?"

Whereupon Stasch, with the hand that he held to his breast, without attracting attention,

managed to make the sign of the cross, just as though he were going to spring from a sinking ship into deep water.

"Prophet," he said, "I am not familiar with your teaching, so if I were to accept it I should do so only from fear, like cowards and base persons, and do you wish cowards and base persons to accept your faith?"

While he was speaking he continued to look the Mahdi unflinchingly in the eye. The silence that ensued was so great that the buzzing of the bees could be heard. Besides this, something very unusual happened. The Mahdi was embarrassed for a moment and could not think what reply to make. Stretching out his hand, he grasped a bottle-gourd filled with water and honey and began to drink, but evidently only to gain time and to hide his embarrassment.

And the brave boy, a true descendant of the defenders of Christianity, stood with his head erect awaiting his sentence. On his sunken cheek, tanned by the desert wind, there was now a tinge of pink, his eyes shone brightly, and a thrill of exaltation passed through his delicate body. "Every one," he thought, "has accepted his teaching, but I have neither renounced my Faith nor sacrificed my soul." And the fear of what might happen and would happen remained buried in his breast, and he was filled with joy and pride. Then the Mahdi, putting down the bottle-gourd, asked:

"So you refuse to accept my teaching?"

188 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"I am what my father is—a Christian!"

"Whosoever closes his ears to the heavenly voice," said the Mahdi slowly, and in a changed tone of voice, "is nothing more than wood, to be cast into the fire."

Calif Abdullah, who was known for his severity and cruelty, showed his white teeth like a wild animal and said:

"This boy's answers are rude; therefore, sir, punish him, or permit me to do so."

"All is over," thought Stasch to himself.

But the Mahdi, who was always desirous that the fame of his mercy might spread not only among the Dervishes, but throughout the whole world, thought that too severe a sentence, especially against a small boy, might be bad for his reputation. For a while he passed the glass beads of the rosary between his fingers, and then said:

"No; these children were carried off on Smain's account; therefore, though I have nothing to do with unbelievers, they must be sent to Smain. This is my wish!"

"It shall be done," answered the Calif.

Then the Mahdi pointed to Idris, Gebhr, and the Bedouins.

"These people, O Abdullah, you must reward in my name, for they have completed a long and dangerous journey in order to serve God and myself."

Then he nodded as a sign that the audience was at an end, and in like manner he ordered

the Greek to leave him. When the latter reached the place of prayer, which was now dark, he took hold of Stasch by the arm and vented his rage and despair by shaking him.

"Cursed one! You have endangered the life of this innocent child," he said, pointing to Nell. "You have ruined yourself and perhaps Nell, too."

"I could not act otherwise," answered Stasch.

"You could not! Remember that you are about to take a second journey, which will be a hundred times worse than the first. It means death— Do you understand? In Fashoda the fever will be the end of you in a week's time. The Mahdi knows why he is sending you to Smain."

"We might also have died had we remained in Omdurman."

"That is not so! If you had lived in the Mahdi's house, in prosperity and in comfort, you would not have died. And he was prepared to take you under his wing. I know that he intended to do so. But you have shown how ungrateful you are to me for having interested myself in you! Now you can do what you please! In a week Abdullah will send the camel-post to Fashoda, and during this week you can do what you please! You will never see me again."

With these words he went away, but soon

returned. He was talkative, as all Greeks are, and felt the necessity of giving vent to his opinions. He was thoroughly angry, and wanted to fire his rage at Stasch's head. He was not cruel, nor had he a bad heart, but he wanted the boy to realize the terrible responsibility he had incurred by not profiting by his warning and advice.

"Who would have prevented you from being a Christian at heart?" he said. "Do you think I am not a Christian? But I am no fool. You have preferred to make a display of false courage. Up to this time I have been able to be of great service to the white prisoners, but henceforth I can not do anything for them, because the Mahdi is angry with me, too. They all will perish! And your little companion in suffering will surely die! You have killed her! In Fashoda even grown people succumb like flies to the fever, and how can such a child escape? When you are forced to walk alongside of the horses and camels, she will die the very first day. And you will be to blame for it. You ought to be happy now, you Christian!——"

He walked away, and they turned off from the place of prayer and went through narrow, dark lanes toward the tents. They walked a long time, for the town was very large. Nell, who was greatly overcome by fatigue, hunger, fear, and the terrible sensations she had experienced all day, stopped to rest; but Idris and

Gebhr pushed her ahead faster. After a while, however, her feet absolutely refused to move a step farther. Then Stasch, without thinking much about it, picked her up in his arms and carried her. On the way he wanted to speak to her, wanted to justify himself by telling her that he could not have acted otherwise than he had, but his mind was a blank and he could only repeat over and over again: "Nell! Nell! Nell!" and pressed her to him, unable to say another word. After they had gone a short distance Nell was so tired that she fell asleep in his arms, and so he walked silently through the quiet of the sleepy little streets, that were disturbed only by the conversation of Idris and Gebhr.

Their hearts were happy, which was lucky for Stasch, for otherwise they might have wanted to punish him again for having answered the Mahdi so rudely. But they were so absorbed with what had happened to them that they were quite unable to think of anything else.

"I felt ill," said Idris, "but the sight of the prophet made me well again."

"He is like a palm in the desert and cold water on a warm day, and his words are like ripe dates," answered Gebhr.

"Nur-el-Tadhil lied when he told us that the Mahdi would not admit us to his presence. He did admit us, and he blessed us, and told Abdullah to reward us."

192 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"He will certainly reward us well, for the will of the Mahdi is sacred."

"Bismillah! May it be as you say," said one of the Bedouins.

And Gebhr began to dream of innumerable camels, horned cattle, horses, and sacks filled with piasters. Idris awakened him from his dreams by pointing to Stasch, who was carrying the sleeping Nell, and asked:

"And what are we to do with that wasp and this fly?"

"Ha! Smain must give us an extra reward for them."

"I am sorry they did not fall into the hands of the Calif, who would have taught this young dog what it means to bark at the truth and the chosen one of God."

"The Mahdi is merciful," answered Idris, and then after a while he continued:

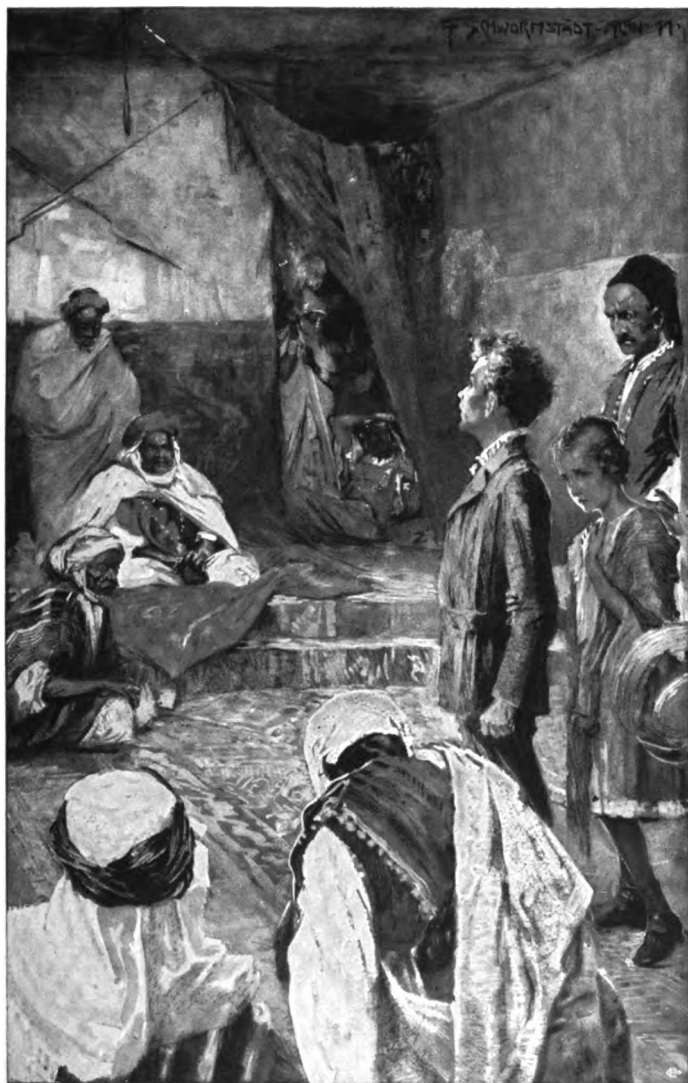
"Still, it is certain that if Smain has them both in his hands, neither the Turks nor the English will kill his children and Fatima."

"Then perhaps he will reward us?"

"Yes. So Abdullah's post is to take them to Fashoda, and a heavy load will be off our shoulders. And when Smain returns here we will demand a reward from him."

"So you think we should remain in Omdurman?"

"Allah! Have you not had enough traveling in that journey from Fayoum to Khartum? It is quite time to take a rest!"



"The brave boy, a true descendant of the defenders of Christianity, stood with his head erect awaiting his sentence."—PAGE 187.

The tents were now close by, but Stasch walked more slowly, for his strength was becoming exhausted. Even though Nell was light, he felt her weight more and more. The Sudanese, who were impatient to lie down and sleep, shouted at him to hurry up, and at last they pushed him along by striking him on the head with their fists.

The boy bore everything in silence, his one thought being always to protect his little sister, and it was only when one of the Bedouins gave him a blow that nearly knocked him down that he said through his clenched teeth:

"We shall reach Fashoda alive!"

This kept the Arabs from doing further violence, for they were afraid to disobey the commands of the prophet. But they were even more affected by the fact that Idris was suddenly seized with such a severe attack of dizziness that he had to lean on Gebhr's arm, and although the pain ceased after a while, the Sudanese became alarmed and said:

"Allah! Something must be the matter with me! Have I been seized with some illness?"

"You have seen the Mahdi, and therefore you will not be ill," answered Gebhr.

They finally reached the barracks, and summoning all his strength, Stasch put the sleeping Nell in the care of old Dinah, who, though indisposed herself, nevertheless prepared a very comfortable resting-place for her little lady.

194 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

After the Sudanese and the Bedouins had swallowed a piece of raw meat, they threw themselves down as heavy as logs on the cloth rugs. Stasch was given nothing to eat, but Dinah pushed a handful of soaked maize toward him, a small quantity of which she had stolen from the camels. But he was neither sleepy nor hungry.

The burden that rested on his shoulders was really more than heavy. He felt that he had done right, and even if he forfeited the good will of the Mahdi, which one could purchase by denying one's faith, he knew his father would be very proud of his decision, and that it would make him very happy, but at the same time he thought that he had endangered the life of Nell, his companion in misfortune and his beloved sister, for whom he would willingly have given the last drop of his blood.

And so when every one was asleep he sobbed as if his heart would break, and lay on the piece of cloth rug weeping for a long time like a child, which, after all, he still was.

CHAPTER XVI

THE visit to the Mahdi and his talk with him had evidently not brought health to Idris, for during that very night he fell seriously ill, and in the morning became unconscious. Chamis, Gebhr, and the Bedouins were sent for to appear before the calif, who detained them sev-

eral hours and praised them for their courage. But they returned in a very bad temper and were exceedingly angry, for they had expected heaven knows what kind of reward, and now Abdullah had awarded them only an Egyptian pound¹ and a horse. The Bedouins began to quarrel with Gebhr, and they nearly came to blows, but finally decided that they would ride along to Fashoda with the camel-post, so as to demand payment from Smain. Chamis, in the hope that Smain's protection would be more advantageous to him than staying in Omdurman, accompanied them.

And then there began a week of hunger and privation for the children, for Gebhr never even thought of supplying them with food. Happily Stasch still had two Maria Theresa thalers,² that he had received from the Greek, and so he went to the town to buy dates and rice. The Sudanese had nothing to say against this, for they knew that he could not escape from Omdurman, and that he would on no account leave the little "Biut." But the walk was not without incident, for the sight of the boy in European clothing buying provisions in the market-place attracted a crowd of half-savage Dervishes, who greeted him with laughter and howls. Luckily many of them had seen him the day before when he was with the Mahdi, and so they restrained the others, who wanted

¹ About four dollars and seventy-five cents.

² About two dollars.

196 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

to attack him. The children, however, threw stones and sand at him, but he paid no attention to them.

Prices in the market were exceedingly high, so he could not get dates, and Gebhr took most of the rice away to give to his sick brother. The boy resisted this with all his strength, which resulted in a scuffle, from which naturally the weaker one emerged bumped and bruised. Chamis' cruelty now first became evident. He only showed an attachment to Saba, and fed him with raw meat, but he viewed with the greatest indifference the needs of the children, whom he had known for some time, and who had always been kind to him; and when Stasch turned to him, begging him to give Nell something to eat, he answered laughingly:

"Go and beg."

Finally things came to such a pass the next day that Stasch really had to beg to save Nell from suffering from hunger. His efforts were not altogether futile. Many times a former soldier, an officer of the Khedive of Egypt, gave him a few piasters or a handful of dried figs, and told him he would help him the following day. Once he met a missionary and a Sister of Charity, who wept on hearing the tale of the children's fate, and although they themselves were exhausted from hunger, they shared what they had with him. They also promised to visit them in the barracks, and the following day actually came, in the hope that

they might succeed in being permitted to take the children along with them until the departure of the post. But Gebhr and Chamis drove them away with scourges.

On the following day Stasch met them again, and they gave him a little rice and two small quinine powders, of which the missionary told him to be especially careful, in case they should get the fever in Fashoda.

"You are now going," he said, "to ride along the banks of the White Nile, which has overflowed, or straight through the so-called Sud-dis. As the river can not flow freely on account of the obstacles in its path, the plants and leaves which the current carries along pile up in the shallow places, where they form large, infectious puddles. There the fever does not spare even the negroes. Take special care not to sleep on the bare ground at night without a fire."

"Would we had died!" Stasch answered, half sighing.

Now the missionary, raising his wan face toward heaven, prayed a while, and making the sign of the cross on the boy, said:

"Put your faith in God! You have not denied Him, and His mercy and protection will be over you."

Stasch not only attempted to beg, but also tried to get work. One day when he saw crowds working in the place of prayer, he went over to them and began to carry clay to the

198 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

wall which was being built around the place. It is true that he was laughed at and pushed about, but in the evening the old sheik, the overseer, gave him twelve dates. Stasch was very much pleased with this reward, for after rice dates were the only food that was good for Nell, and it was becoming more and more difficult to find them in Omdurman.

So he proudly presented the dozen dates to his little sister, to whom he brought everything he could find. During the last few days he had lived mostly on maize that he had stolen from the camels. Nell was delighted when she saw her favorite fruit, but she wanted Stasch to share them with her. Standing on tip-toe, she put her arms around his neck, and raising her little head, looked in his eyes and begged:

"Stasch! Eat half of them! Eat them!"

But he answered:

"I have already eaten. I have already eaten. Oh, I have had a great plenty!"

He smiled, but soon after bit his lips to prevent bursting into tears, for he was really all but starved. He resolved to go out the next day in search of work. But things happened that changed his plans. Early in the morning a messenger came by order of Abdullah to announce that the camel-post would depart for Fashoda during the night, and he brought an order from the calif stating that Idris, Gebhr, Chamis, and the two Bedouins should have themselves and the children in readiness for the

journey. This order astonished and annoyed Gebhr, and he declared that he would not ride because his brother was ill, and there was no one to take care of him, and that even if he were well they had decided to remain in Omdurman.

But the messenger answered:

"The Mahdi never changes his mind, and Abdullah, his calif and my master, never changes his orders. A slave can take care of your brother, but you will ride with the others to Fashoda."

"Then I will go to the calif and tell him that I will not ride."

"Only those gain admittance to the calif whom he wishes to see, and if you try to force your way in without permission you will be led out to the gallows."

"Allah Akbar! Then tell me plainly that I am a slave."

"Be quiet and obey orders!" answered the messenger.

The Sudanese had seen the gallows in Omdurman almost broken down from the weight of those hanged on them, and that after the cruel Abdullah had pronounced sentence new bodies were strung up daily, so he was afraid. What the messenger had told him about the Mahdi never changing his mind and Abdullah never changing his orders was confirmed by all the Dervishes. Therefore there was no way of escape, and they would have to ride.

200 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"I shall never see Idris again," thought Gebhr. In his tiger-like heart there was still a feeling of affection for his elder brother, and the thought of leaving him behind ill filled him with despair. It was in vain that Chamis and the Bedouins explained to him that perhaps they would be better off in Fashoda than in Omdurman, and that Smain would probably not give them any larger reward than the calif had done. But nothing they could say was able to dispel Gebhr's sadness or appease his anger, which of course he vented chiefly on Stasch.

For the boy this was a day of real martyrdom. He was not allowed to go to the market-place, and so he could neither earn nor beg anything, and he was made to work like a slave at the baggage, which was being made ready for the journey, and this was all the more difficult because he was very weak from hunger and fatigue. He was just about ready to die on the way, either from Gebhr's scourge or from exhaustion.

Fortunately, toward evening the Greek appeared. As we have already said, he had a good heart, and notwithstanding all that had taken place, he came to see the children, to take leave of them, and to give them the most necessary things for the journey. He brought them several little quinine powders and some glass beads and provisions. On hearing that Idris was ill, he turned

THROUGH THE DESERT 201

towards Gebhr, Chamis, and the Bedouins and said:

"I have come by order of the Mahdi."

When they bowed low on hearing these words, he continued:

"You are to supply the children with food on the way and are to treat them well. They are to tell Smain how you have treated them, and Smain will report it to the prophet. If there be any complaint about you, the following post will bring you your death warrant."

A second bow was the only answer to these words, whereupon Gebhr and Chamis made faces like dogs that are being muzzled.

The Greek told them to go away; then he added in English as he turned toward the children:

"I invented all this, for the Mahdi gave no further orders concerning you. But as he said that you were to ride to Fashoda, you must naturally reach there alive. Besides, I calculate that none of these people will see the Mahdi or the calif before they start on this journey."

Then he turned to Stasch and continued:

"Boy, I had a grudge against you, and I still have it. Do you know that you nearly caused my ruin? The Mahdi was angry with me, and to appease him I had to give up a considerable part of my fortune to Abdullah, and I am not quite sure yet whether I am safe for only a while or for always. At any rate, hereafter I

202 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

shall not be able to assist the prisoners as I have done. But I am sorry for you, and especially for this girl here. I have a daughter about her age, whom I love more than my own life. All that I have done I did on her account. Christ will bear me witness to that. She still wears a silver cross under her dress, next her heart. Her name is the same as yours, my little one. If it were not for her I should prefer to die rather than to live in this hell."

He was overcome by emotion, and remained silent for a while, then he passed his hand over his forehead and began to talk of something else.

"The Mahdi is sending you to Fashoda, secretly hoping that you will die there. This is his means of taking revenge on you—especially on account of your resistance, boy, which wounded him deeply—without endangering his name, 'the merciful one.' He is always like that. But who can tell which will die first! Abdullah suggested the idea of ordering these dogs, who carried you off, to ride along with you. He rewarded them very meagerly, and is afraid this may become known. Besides, he and the prophet do not want these people to spread the news that there are still soldiers, cannon, money, and the English in Egypt. But it will be a hard journey and a long one. You will pass through a desolate and unhealthy land, and these powders will protect you."

"Sir, tell Gebhr once more not to dare let Nell starve nor to beat her," begged Stasch.

"Fear nothing. I have spoken about you to the old sheik who drives the post. He is an old acquaintance of mine, and I have given him a watch, and this insured his protection for you."

With these words he prepared to leave them. Taking Nell in his arms, he pressed her to his heart and whispered:

"God bless you, my child!"

Meanwhile the sun had gone down and it was starlight. Through the darkness could be heard the neighing of the horses and the panting of the heavily laden camels.

CHAPTER XVII

THE old sheik, Hatim, faithfully kept the promise he had made to the Greek, and carefully protected the children. The road to the upper White Nile was a difficult one. They rode through Getena, El-Dueim, and Kawa; then they passed Abba, a wooded island in the Nile, on which, before the Mahdi's war, a Dervish had lived in a hollow tree the life of a hermit. The caravan had to go around wide tracts of land covered with papyrus and swamps called "Suddis," from which the wind blew a stench caused by rotted and decaying leaves that had accumulated around obstructions in the river. The English engineers had once removed these obstructions, and at one

204 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

time steamers could go from Khartum to Fashoda, and even farther up.¹ But now the river was clogged up again, and as it could not flow freely, it overflowed both banks. The districts on the right and left banks were covered with a high jungle, from the midst of which heaps of ant-hills and isolated giant trees towered. In some places the woods extended to the stream. In dry places grew large groves of acacias.

During the first few weeks they still passed Arab settlements and small towns, consisting of houses with peculiar, ball-shaped roofs of straw, but on the other side of Abba, behind the settlement Gos-Abu-Guma, when they came to the land of the blacks, they found it quite deserted, for the Dervishes had carried off nearly all the natives and sold them in the slave-markets of Khartum, Omdurman, and other places. Those who escaped capture by hiding in the thickets and in the woods died of hunger and smallpox, which was unusually prevalent along the White and Blue Nile. The Dervishes themselves said that "entire nations" had died of it. Places that were formerly sorghum and banana plantations were now covered with jungle. Only wild animals multiplied, because there was no one to hunt them. Sometimes about sunset the children saw in the distance herds of elephants, that looked

¹ After the collapse of the kingdom of the Dervishes communication was again resumed.

like moving rocks, slowly walking to their watering-place. As soon as Hatim, who was formerly an ivory-trader, caught sight of them he smacked his lips, sighed, and said confidentially to Stasch:

"Maschallah! How valuable they are! But they are not worth while hunting now, for the Mahdi has forbidden the Egyptian merchants to come to Khartum; so there is no one except the emirs to buy elephant tusks."

Besides seeing elephants, they also came across giraffes, which ran off, treading heavily and swaying their long necks, as though they were lame. Behind Gos-Abu-Guma buffaloes and herds of antelope appeared more frequently. When the caravan was short of meat the men hunted them, but nearly always without success, for these animals are too watchful and fleet to be outwitted or cornered.

Usually the food was meted out somewhat sparingly, for in consequence of the land having been depopulated, one could not buy millet, bananas or fish, which the negroes of the Schil-luk and the Dinka tribes used to sell to caravans in exchange for glass beads and copper wire.

Hatim saw that the children did not starve, though he kept Gebhr on short rations, and once, when they had halted for the night and were taking the saddles off the camels, Gebhr struck Stasch, and Hatim ordered him to be laid on the ground, and gave him thirty blows

206 *THROUGH THE DESERT.*

with a bamboo rod on the sole of each foot. For two days the cruel Sudanese could only walk on his toes, and he revenged himself on a young slave named Kali who had been given him.

At first Stasch felt almost glad that they had left the infected Omdurman and that he was now passing through countries which he had always longed to see. His strong constitution had, up to this time, withstood the fatigue of the journey quite well, and having plenty to eat, he regained his lost energy. On the march, and also during the halts for rest, he would again whisper to his little sister that it was possible to escape by way of the White Nile, and that he had by no means given up this idea. But he was worried about her health. Three weeks had now passed since they had left Omdurman. Nell had not been stricken with the fever as yet, but her face had become thin, and instead of getting tanned it had become more and more transparent, and her little hands had a waxen look. Stasch and Dinah, with the assistance of Hatim, saw that she was well cared for and that she had every comfort, but she missed the health-giving desert air. The damp, hot climate, together with the fatigue of the journey, sapped still more the strength of the delicate child.

When they reached Gos-Abu-Guma Stasch began giving her half a small quinine powder daily, and he was greatly troubled when he

thought that he had not enough of this medicine to last very long and that he would not be able to get any more. But there was no help for it, because it was most necessary to take precautions against the fever. At times he would have yielded to fear and despair had it not been for the hope that Smain, if he wanted to exchange them for his own children, would have to find a more healthy place than Fashoda for them to live in.

But misfortune seemed to follow its victims continually. The day before they arrived in Fashoda, Dinah, who felt weak when they were in Omdurman, suddenly fainted and fell off the camel while opening Nell's traveling bag, which they had brought with them from Fayoum. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Chamis and Stasch resuscitated her. But she did not regain consciousness until toward evening, and then only long enough to bid a tearful good-by to her beloved little lady and die. Gebhr wanted very much to cut the ears off the remains, so that he could show them to Smain as a proof that she had died on the way. That was what was done to slaves who died on a journey. But at the request of Stasch and Nell, Hatim did not allow this, and she was buried with honor, and stones and thorns were piled on her grave to protect it from hyenas. The children now felt even more lonely, for in losing her they had lost the only soul who stood near to them and who was de-

voted to them. To Nell especially it was a cruel blow, and during the night and the following day Stasch tried in vain to comfort her.

The sixth week of the journey had begun. On the following day, toward noon, the caravan reached Fashoda, but found it in ruins. The Mahdists bivouacked in the open air or in huts which had been hastily built of grass and branches. The settlement had been completely destroyed by fire three days before. Nothing remained but the smoke-blackened walls of the round clay huts and a wooden shed at the water's edge, which during the time of the Egyptian rule had been used as a storehouse for ivory, and in which at the present time lived the leader of the Dervishes, the emir, Seki Tamala. He was a man who was respected by the Mahdists, a secret enemy of Calif Abdullah, but, on the other hand, a personal friend of Hatim. The emir was most hospitable to the old sheik and the children, but at the very beginning he told them an unwelcome piece of news.

Smain was no longer in Fashoda. Two days before he had started on an expedition after slaves in the district lying southeast of the Nile, and no one knew when he would return, for the next settlement had been deserted, so that it was necessary to seek merchandise in human beings at a great distance. It is true that not very far from Fashoda lies Abyssinia, with which country the Dervishes were at war.

But Smain, who had only three hundred men, did not dare cross the borders, which were strictly guarded by the warlike inhabitants of the land and by the soldiers of King John.

Under these circumstances Seki Tamala and Hatim had to decide what was to be done with the children. The consultation was carried on chiefly during supper, to which the emir had also invited Stasch and Nell.

"I," said he to Hatim, "with all my men must soon undertake a long expedition to the south, against Emin Pasha, who is in Lado, where he has steamers and soldiers. Hatim, you brought me the order to go. You must return to Omdurman, and then not a human being will be left in Fashoda. There are no comfortable houses here and nothing to eat, and besides, it is a very unhealthy place. I know that white people do not take smallpox, but the fever would kill these children in a month's time."

"I received orders to bring them to Fashoda," answered Hatim, "and I have brought them here, and I do not really need to trouble myself further about them. But my friend, the Greek Kaliopuli, commended them to me, and for that reason I should not like them to die."

"But that is what will certainly happen!"

"Then what is to be done?"

"Instead of leaving them behind in Fashoda, where there is not a human being, send them to Smain with the people who brought them to Omdurman. Smain has gone off toward the

210 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

mountains, to a dry and high district, where the fever is not so fatal as here by the river."

"But how will they find Smain?"

"By following the track of the fires. He will set fire to the jungle, in the first place, so as to drive the game into the ravines, where it can be easily hunted down, and secondly, to frighten away the heathen from the thickets, where they have fled from their pursuers—and so it will not be difficult to find Smain."

"But will they be able to overtake him?"

"He will sometimes remain a whole week in a place, as he has to smoke meat. But even if he should go on after two or three days, they will certainly overtake him."

"But why should they run after him? He will return to Fashoda."

"No; if he should be successful in his hunt for slaves he will take them to the towns to the market——"

"Then what is to be done?"

"Remember that when we two leave Fashoda, if the children remain here they will either succumb to the fever or starve to death."

"By the prophet, that is true!"

So there was nothing else to do but send the children on a new expedition. Hatim, who had proved himself a good man, was especially worried, fearing that Gebhr—whose cruelty he had discovered during the journey—would wreak his vengeance on them. But the terrible Seki Tamala, of whom even his own soldiers stood

in dread, ordered the Sudanese to come before him, and told him that he must deliver the children alive and well to Smain, and treat them well, for if he did not he would be hanged. Besides that, the good Hatim begged the emir to give little Nell a slave to wait on her and to nurse her during the journey and in Smain's camp. Nell was greatly pleased with this gift, especially when she found that the slave was a young girl of the Dinka tribe, with pleasant features and a sweet expression.

Stasch knew that to remain in Fashoda meant death, so he did not beg Hatim not to send them on another journey—their third. Besides, in the depths of his soul he thought that when riding toward the southeast they would have to approach the borders of Abyssinia, and might be able to escape. Moreover, he cherished the hope that on those dry heights Nell might escape the fever. For all these reasons he gladly and enthusiastically began making preparations for the journey.

Gebhr, Chamis and the two Bedouins also had nothing to say against the expedition, for they, too, reckoned that at Smain's side they might be able to capture larger numbers of slaves and that they could then sell them to advantage at the markets. They knew that slave-traders sometimes attain great wealth; at any rate, they preferred to ride instead of remaining where they were under Hatim's and Seki Tamala's strict rule.

212 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

But the preparations for departure took considerable time, especially because the children had to rest. Camels could not be used for this journey, and so the Arabs and also Stasch and Nell were to ride on horses, while Kali, Gebhr's slave, and Nell's servant, who was called "Mea," at Stasch's suggestion were to go on foot. Hatim also supplied a donkey, which carried a tent intended for the girl, and also enough provisions to last the children three days. Seki Tamala could give them no more. A kind of ladies' saddle was constructed for Nell out of palm and bamboo mats.

The children spent three days in Fashoda recovering from their journey, but the numerous swarms of gnats by the river made a further stay impossible. During the day there were a great many large blue flies, which, although they did not bite, were very troublesome because they got into one's ears, eyes, and mouth. Stasch had once heard in Port Said that gnats and flies spread fever and the germs of an eye disease, so at last he besought Seki Tamala to let them start as soon as possible, especially as the spring rainy season was about to begin.

CHAPTER XVIII

"**S**TASCH, why do we always ride without finding Smain?"

"I don't know. Most likely he is traveling rapidly so as to lose no time in reaching the

districts where he can capture the most slaves. Would you be glad if we could really join his division?"

The girl nodded her little blonde head as a sign that she was most willing.

"Why would you like it?" asked Stasch, surprised.

"Because in the presence of Smain perhaps Gebhr would not dare beat this poor Kali so terribly."

"Probably Smain is no better. None of them has any mercy for their slaves."

"Yes, you are right."

And tears flowed down her wan cheeks. This was the ninth day of the journey. Gebhr, who was now the leader of the caravan, at first found a few traces of Smain's march. Stretches of burned jungle and places where he had camped, crunched bones, and various discarded material marked his route.

Five days later they came to a wide steppe, where the wind had carried the fire in every direction. The traces were indistinct and confusing, for Smain had apparently divided his company into several small groups in order to facilitate cornering the game and obtaining provisions. Gebhr did not know which direction to take, and it often seemed as if the caravan had traveled around in a circle, returning to the same place from which it started. Then they came upon woods, and after having traveled through them, they entered a rocky coun-

214 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

try, where the ground was covered with flat slabs or small level stones, that for some distance were strewn so thickly that they reminded the children of the roads in town. The vegetation was scanty. Only here and there, in the clefts of the rocks, grew euphorbias, mimosas, and rarer and slimmer pale green trees, which Kali, in the Ki-swahili language, called "m'ti." The horses were fed with the leaves of these trees. In this land there were very few small rivers and streams, but fortunately it rained now and then, and there was sufficient water in the cavities and clefts of the rocks.

Smain's party had frightened off the game, and the caravan would have died of hunger had it not been for a number of Pentaren birds that flew into the air every second from between the horses' feet. Toward evening the trees were so full of them that one had only to shoot in their direction to bring some of them down, and they served for food. Besides, they were not shy, for they let people approach them, and were so clumsy and heavy in preparing for flight that Saba, who generally ran in advance of the caravan, caught and killed some of them nearly every day. Chamis killed a number of these birds with his old flintlock musket that he had stolen from one of the Dervishes under Hatim, on the road from Omdurman to Fashoda. But he only had enough shot for twenty cartridges, and he felt very much worried when he thought of what would happen when they

were used up. Notwithstanding the game had been frightened away, they occasionally saw herds of gazels, a beautiful species of antelope which is found all over central Africa. These animals, however, could only be shot, and the men did not know how to use Stasch's gun, and Gebhr would not give it to him.

But the Sudanese also began to be worried about the length of time they were on the way. Sometimes he even thought of returning to Fashoda, for if they were to miss Smain they might get lost in the wilderness and not only suffer from hunger, but be in danger of attack by wild animals and still wilder negroes, who vowed vengeance on account of having been hunted for slaves. But as he did not know that Seki Tamala had undertaken an expedition against Emin Pasha, because he had not been present when the conversation on that subject had taken place, he was alarmed at the thought of appearing before the powerful emir, who had ordered him to bring the children to Smain, and who had given him a letter to take to him, threatening that if he did not execute his orders faithfully he would be hanged. All this combined to fill his heart with bitterness and rage. Though he did not dare to vent his disappointments on Stasch and Nell, poor Kali's back was daily covered with blood from being beaten with the scourge. The slave always approached his cruel master in fear and trembling. But in vain did he clasp him by the feet and kiss his

hands, and fall on his face before him. Neither humility nor groans softened the stony heart; for on the slightest pretext, and sometimes without any provocation at all, the scourge tore the flesh of the unhappy boy. During the night his feet were chained to a piece of wood with two holes in it, so that he could not run away. During the daytime he walked alongside of Gebhr's horse, attached to it by a rope, which greatly amused Chamis. Nell shed tears for poor Kali. Stasch revolted in his heart, and often valiantly championed Kali, but when he noticed that this annoyed Gebhr still more he simply clenched his teeth and was silent.

Kali perceived that they both sympathized with him, and he began to grow very fond of them.

For two days they had ridden through a rocky ravine enclosed by high, steep rocks. From the stones which had collected in the wildest confusion it could plainly be seen that the ravine was filled with water during the rainy season, but now the ground was quite dry. On both sides, up against the cliffs, grew a little grass, a great many thorns, and here and there even a few trees. Gebhr had ridden into this stony gorge because it continually went up hill and he thought it would lead to some height from which, by day, it would be easier to see the smoke and by night the flames of Smain's camp-fire. In some places the ravine became so narrow that only two horses

could walk abreast, while in others it expanded into small circular valleys enclosed on all sides by high stone walls, on which sat large apes, that played with one another, and on seeing the caravan barked and showed their teeth.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The sun was already low in the west. Gebhr had begun to think of their night quarters. He was hoping to reach a small valley, in which he could erect a zareba—to surround the caravan and the horses with a hedge of prickly mimosas and acacias, to protect them from being attacked by wild beasts. Saba ran in advance, barking at the monkeys, which, on seeing him, moved about restlessly, and he disappeared time and again in the windings of the ravine, his loud barks being repeated by the echoes.

Suddenly Saba became silent. Soon after he came up at a gallop, the hair on his back bristling, his tail down, and ran up to the horses. The Bedouins and Gebhr knew at once that something must have frightened him, but after they had looked around questioningly they continued on their way to investigate the reason. But when they had passed a small bend they reined in their horses, and for a moment remained as if rooted to the spot at the sight that presented itself before them.

On a large rock in the middle of the ravine, which was fairly broad at this place, lay a lion. They could not have been more than a hundred feet from him. As soon as the

218 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

powerful animal saw the riders and horses he rose on his hind legs and stared at them with gleaming eyes. The rays of the setting sun shone on his enormous head and shaggy breast, and in this red light he resembled one of those sphinxes that ornament the entrances to the ancient Egyptian temples.

The frightened horses began to rear, turn around, and prance backward. The astonished and terrified riders did not know what to do, and frightened and perplexed, cried out as with one voice: "Allah! Bismillah! Allah Akbar!"

The desert king, motionless as bronze, surveyed them from head to foot.

Gebhr and Chamis had heard from merchants who had brought ivory and rubber from Sudan to Egypt that lions sometimes obstruct the route, and that the only thing for a caravan to do is to make a detour around the beast. But now they were in a place from which there was no means of exit but to turn back and run away, and then it was almost certain that the terrible beast would follow them.

Once more the feverish question was asked:

"What is to be done?"

"Allah! Perhaps he will back out!"

"He will not move out of the way."

There was a dead silence. Not a sound could be heard except the snorting of the horses and the rapid breathing of the party.

"Loose Kali from the rope," suddenly said

Chamis to Gebhr, "and we will escape on the horses; then the lion will catch him first, and he will be the only one slain."

"Yes, yes, do so!" replied the Bedouins.

But Gebhr thought Kali would immediately climb up the side of the cliff, while the lion would make a bee-line for the horses. With this in his mind another idea, still more terrible, flashed upon him. He would kill the slave and throw him behind him—then if the beast were to follow them he would see the bloody body lying on the ground and stop to devour it.

So he drew Kali by the rope nearer to his saddle, and had already raised his knife—when Stasch caught hold of him by his wide sleeve:

"Villain, what are you doing?"

Gebhr tried to tear himself loose, and if the boy had caught hold of the arm itself he would have been shaken off at once, but as he had hold of the sleeve, it was not so easy, and while Gebhr tried to tear himself loose he gesticulated and cried in a voice thick with rage:

"Dog, if that one is not sufficient, I will stab you, too. Allah! I will stab you, stab you!"

Stasch became white as a ghost. Like a flash of lightning he thought that if the lion should follow the horses he might in the pursuit overlook Kali's body, and in that case Gebhr would certainly stab them all, one after the other.

Pulling Gebhr's sleeve with increased energy, Stasch screamed out:

220 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Give me the rifle and I will kill the lion!"

The Bedouins were speechless from surprise at these words, but Chamis, who in Port Said had seen how well Stasch could shoot, immediately cried out:

"Give him the gun! He will kill the lion!"

Gebhr also recalled the shooting at Karoon Lake, and in face of their terrible danger he at once ceased to make further resistance, and hastily handed the gun to the boy, while Chamis hurriedly opened the cartridge case, from which Stasch took out a handful.

The boy jumped off his horse, shoved the cartridges into the barrel of the gun, and advanced. While taking his first steps forward he felt stunned, and pictured himself and Nell with their throats cut from ear to ear by Gebhr's knife. But soon the imminent and terrible danger they were in made him oblivious to everything else. A lion was before him! When he first caught sight of the beast everything became black before his eyes. His cheeks and nose felt icy cold, his legs grew heavy as lead, and his breath threatened to give out. In short, he was frightened! In Port Said he always preferred to read something else rather than stories of lion hunts, but it is one thing to look at pictures in a book and another thing to stand face to face with a monster such as now looked at him in surprise while drawing up its broad, shield-like forehead.

The Arabs were breathless, for never in

their lives had they seen anything like this. On one side a small boy, who, in contrast to the high rock, looked still smaller, and on the other a powerful beast, shining like gold in the rays of the sun, magnificent, threatening, really a "Lord with a large head," as the Sudanese call him.

Stasch's iron will quickly controlled his trembling limbs, and he advanced still further. It seemed to him as if his heart were in his throat, until he put up the gun to take aim. Now was the time to have one's wits about one! Should he go still nearer or fire from where he stood? Where should he aim? The shorter the distance the surer the shot! So he went still nearer, he advanced forty steps— Still too far off!—thirty!—twenty! The wind now brought to him the strong scent of the wild animal——

The boy stopped.

"A ball between the eyes, or I am lost!" thought he. "In the name of the Father and of the Son——"

The lion got up, stretched himself, and lowered his head. His mouth began to open and his eyes to narrow. Who was this tiny being that dared come so near? Ready to spring, he crouched on his hind legs, his paws slightly twitching——

At this instant Stasch sighted the gun straight at the middle of the animal's forehead—and pulled the trigger. The shot resounded.

222 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

The lion reared—rose to his full height—fell over on his back with his four paws in the air, and in his death agony rolled off the rock, plunging down to the bottom of the ravine.

For a few minutes Stasch still kept him within range of the gun, but when he saw that the twitching had ceased, and that the yellow body lay there motionless and stiff, he opened the gun and put in another cartridge.

The walls of the cliffs still rang out with loud echoes. Gebhr, Chamis, and the Bedouins could not at first realize what had happened, for it had rained during the previous night, and on account of the humidity in the air the smoke hid everything in the narrow ravine. But when it disappeared they shouted for joy and tried to rush up to the boy, but their efforts were in vain, for no power on earth could force the horses to take even one step forward.

Stasch turned, took in the four Arabs at a glance, and fixed his eyes on Gebhr.

"Enough!" he said, clenching his teeth together. "The measure is more than full. You shall murder neither Nell nor any one else."

And suddenly he felt his cheeks and nose again grow cold, but this was a different kind of cold—not caused by fright, but by a terrible, fixed resolve, that suddenly hardened his heart like steel.

"Yes, it must be!" he said to himself. "They

are all villains, hangmen, murderers—and Nell is in their hands!”

“You shall not kill her!” he repeated.

He approached them—and drew back a pace—then suddenly raised the gun to his shoulder.

Two shots, following in quick succession, echoed through the ravine! Gebhr fell to the ground like a bag of sand. Chamis leaned forward in his saddle and struck the horse’s neck with his bloody forehead.

The two Bedouins screamed with fright, and springing from their horses, rushed at Stasch. The bend in the ravine was directly behind them, and had they fled there, as Stasch ardently hoped, they would have been able to escape death. But blinded by fear and rage, they thought to reach the boy and stab him before he had time to reload. Fools! They had scarcely gone a few steps when the trigger clicked again. The ravine rang with the echoes of the shots and both men fell face downward to the ground, wriggling like fish out of water.

One of them was shot in the throat and not very dangerously wounded; he rose again and supported himself on his hands, but at the same moment Saba buried his teeth in his neck.

Dead silence ensued.

This was interrupted by groans from Kali, who on his knees with outstretched hands screamed in disjointed Ki-swahili sentences:

224 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Bwana Kubwa!¹ Kill the lion! Kill the bad people! But do not kill Kali!"

Stasch did not listen to his cries. For a while he stood there as in a daze. Then he saw Nell's pale little face and her frightened, wide-open, wondering eyes. Springing toward her, he cried:

"Don't be afraid, Nell! We are free, Nell!"

True, they were free, but free in the midst of a wild, uninhabited solitude, lost in the heart of the black country.

¹Great Man.

THROUGH THE DESERT

PART II

CHAPTER I

BEFORE Stasch and the young negro could dispose of the dead bodies of the Arabs and the carcass of the lion the sun had nearly set, and night was approaching. But they could not possibly pass the night near the corpses, and although Kali, stroking his chest and stomach with his hand, pointed to the dead lion as he smacked his lips, and repeated, "*Msuri, nyama*" ("good, good meat"), Stasch would not permit him to touch the "*nyama*," but told him to catch the horses, which had run away at the report of the guns. The black boy executed this order very cleverly, for instead of following them into the valley—in which case they would have continued to run further away—he climbed up the side of the hill and so took a short cut across corners and headed off the frightened animals. In this manner he caught two of them easily, and the other two he drove toward Stasch.

But Gebhr's and Chamis' horses could not be found. Besides these there remained four saddle-horses, not counting the mule which carried the tent and the baggage, and which had been very calm throughout all these tragical events. The donkey was found behind a

226 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

corner quietly grazing on the grass that grew in the bottom of the valley.

The Sudan horses are quite accustomed to the sight of wild animals, though they are afraid of lions. Therefore it took a great deal of persuasion to induce them to pass the rock and the pool of blood. The horses neighed, snorted, and drew their heads back at the sight of the bloodstained stones, but no sooner did the donkey prick up his ears and pass by quietly than they followed. Though night had now begun to fall, they walked on for a while, and only stopped on reaching a place where the valley narrowed once more into a small amphitheater mostly covered with thorns and prickly mimosa bushes.

"Sir," said the young negro, "Kali will make a fire, a large fire."

And he took a broad Sudanese sword which he had removed from Gebhr's corpse and used it to cut down the thorns and large bushes. After he lighted the fire he continued to chop wood until he had a sufficient amount to last through the night.

Then he and Stasch began to set up on the steep side of the valley a small tent for Nell, which they enclosed with a broad and high prickly hedge shaped like a half moon, or with a so-called "Zareba."

Stasch knew from descriptions given by African travelers that they are thus able to protect themselves against the onslaughts of wild

animals. But there was not enough room behind the hedge for the horses, and therefore the boys removed the saddles, harnesses, and bags from the animals, and only tied their feet, so that when searching for grass and water they would not stray away too far.

In fact, water was to be found quite near, in a crevice of a rock which formed a small basin under the opposite boulder. There was enough to quench the thirst of the horses and some to spare for the following morning in which to cook the birds Chamis had shot. And in the baggage which the donkey carried, in addition to the tent, there were found some corn, a little salt, and a bundle of dried manioc roots, which were sufficient for a substantial meal. But only Kali and Mea had any appetite. The young negro, who had been half starved by Gebhr, ate enough for two. He was more than grateful to his new masters, and directly after the meal he fell down on his face before Stasch and Nell, to denote that he would remain their slave until his dying day; and he also showed great respect for Stasch's rifle, possibly with the correct idea that it would be safer to obtain in advance the good will of such a powerful weapon. Then he declared that he would take turns with Mea watching over the "Great Man" and the "Bibi" while they slept, and that he would also see that the fire did not go out.

Then he immediately squatted down in front of them, crossed his legs, and hummed a little

228 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

tune, in which he invariably repeated the refrain, "*Simba kufa, simba kufa*," which in the Ki-swahili language means "The lion is dead."

But neither the "Great Man" nor the "Small Bibi" felt sleepy, and Stasch had to coax Nell before he could induce her to taste a little of the bird and a few grains of the boiled corn. She said she could neither eat nor sleep, and that she only wanted a drink. Stasch was afraid she was getting the fever, but he was soon convinced to the contrary, as even her hands were cold. He was eventually able to induce her to go into the tent, where he had arranged a place for her to lie down, after having at first carefully looked to see if there were any scorpions in the grass. As for him, he sat down on a stone with his rifle on his arm, to guard her from an onslaught of wild animals, in case the fire should prove insufficient protection. He was overcome by fatigue and greatly exhausted, and repeated to himself over and over again, "I have killed Gebhr and Chamis and the Bedouins; I have killed a lion and we are free." But he felt as though some one else were whispering these words to him and that he could not comprehend their meaning. He only knew that they were free, and at the same time something terrible had happened, which filled him with uneasiness and pressed like a heavy weight on his chest. At last his thoughts became indistinct. For a while he gazed at the moth which hovered over the flame, and at last he began to

nod and doze. Kali, too, was napping, but awoke every now and then and threw branches into the fire.

The night was dark, and—what is very unusual near the equator—very quiet. Nothing could be heard but the crackling of the burning thorns and the flickering of the flames as they lighted up the promontories of the cliffs, which formed a half circle. The moon did not shine into the interior of the gorge, but millions of strange stars twinkled. The air had become so cold that Stasch awoke, sleepy and chilly, and he was alarmed lest the cold might harm little Nell.

However, he was reassured when he remembered that he had left for her, on the rug in the tent, the shawl which Dinah had taken away from Fayoum. He also remembered that they had unknowingly been riding up hill from the time they quitted the banks of the Nile, and that consequently now, after several days of travel, they ought to be fairly high up, so as to be beyond any danger from fever, which infested the land by the river. The penetrating chilliness of the night seemed to substantiate his opinion.

This thought gave him courage. He entered the tent for a moment to hear if Nell was sleeping peacefully, then he returned, settled down nearer the fire, and began to doze once more, and in fact soon fell fast asleep.

Suddenly Saba, who had stretched himself

230 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

out to sleep at his feet, aroused him by growling.

Kali awoke also, and both began to look anxiously at the dog. He lay there tense as the string of a bow, pricking up his ears, with dilated nostrils, sniffing the air, and staring into the darkness in the direction from which they had come. The hair on his neck and his back stood on end, his chest expanded with his heavy breathing, and he growled.

The young slave hurriedly threw some branches on the fire.

"Sir," he whispered, "take your gun, take your gun."

Stasch took up his rifle and crouched in front of the fire so that he could get a better view of the dark bend of the gorge. Saba's growls changed into a short bark. For a little while there was no sound; then from a distance Kali and Stasch heard a dull tramping, as though large animals were running toward the fire. This tramping resounded through the night, echoed from cliff to cliff, and increased every second.

Stasch felt that great danger was approaching. But what could it be? Perhaps buffaloes or a couple of rhinoceroses trying to find their way out of the gorge. In this case if the report of a shot were not successful in frightening them and causing them to retrace their steps, nothing could save the caravan, for these animals are just as vicious and liable to attack one

as animals of prey; and they have no fear of fire, and destroy everything that comes in their way.

But what if it were a division of Smain's expedition, which, after having discovered the corpse in the gorge, was hunting for the murderer! Stasch could not make up his mind as to which would be the better—a quick death, or to be put in prison again. At the same time it occurred to him that if Smain himself happened to be in this division he would most likely spare them, but if he were not there the Dervishes would either murder them at once or—which would be still worse—torture them terribly before putting them to death.

"Oh," thought he, "let us pray that they are animals and not human beings."

Meanwhile the tramping increased, and changed into the clatter of hoofs, until at last out of the darkness appeared fiery eyes, dilated nostrils, and manes disheveled from running.

"Horses!" exclaimed Kali.

These were really Gebhr's and Chamis' horses. They came running at a wild gallop, obviously driven on by fright, but as they rushed into the light and saw their captive friends they reared, neighed, pawed the ground with their hoofs, and then for a while stood motionless.

Stasch did not remove his gun from his shoulder. He was sure that behind the horses the disheveled head of a lion or the flat skull

of a leopard might appear at any minute. But he waited in vain. The horses gradually quieted down, and what was more important, Saba stopped sniffing, and stretching himself out after the manner of dogs, turned round and round on the same spot, curled up and closed his eyes. If animals of prey had chased the horses, it was evident that they had slowly turned back on smelling the smoke or seeing the fire light reflected on the rocks.

"At any rate, something must have frightened them very much," said Stasch to Kali; "because they were not afraid to run past the corpses of the men and lion."

"Sir," answered the boy, "Kali imagines what has happened. A great many hyenas and jackals have entered the gorge to reach the corpses. The horses have run away from them, and the hyenas did not pursue them because they were devouring Gebhr and the others—"

"That may be, but go now and take the saddles off the horses and bring the harnesses and the water-bags here. Do not be afraid; the gun will protect you."

"Kali not afraid," said the boy, and as he pushed aside some of the thorns that were next to the cliffs he stole out of the hedge, and at the same time Nell stepped out of the tent.

Saba arose at once, sniffed at her, and expected the customary caress. At first she stretched out her hand, but drew it back imme-

diately, thoroughly disgusted. "Stasch, what has happened?" said she.

"Nothing; those two horses came running up here. Did their tramping awaken you?"

"I was awake before, and was just going to leave the tent, but——"

"But what?"

"I thought you would be angry."

"I! Angry with you?"

Nell raised her eyes and gazed at him with a very peculiar expression, an expression he had never seen before. Over Stasch's face then passed a look of surprise, for from her words and looks he saw that she was terrified.

"She is afraid of me," thought he.

And for a moment he even felt quite satisfied. Then he thought that after all he had accomplished even Nell—who did not think of him merely as a full-grown man, but also as a terrible warrior, who inspires every one with fear—should look up at him and caress him. But this feeling of elation did not last long, for his sad experience had taught him to observe closely, and so he noticed that the girl's restless eyes denoted not only fear, but a certain repugnance because of what had occurred, in consequence of the blood that had been shed and the horrors that she had witnessed this very day.

He also immediately remembered that a moment ago she had withdrawn her hand so as to avoid stroking Saba, for he it was who had

234 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

killed one of the Bedouins. Yes, that was the reason, and did not Stasch himself feel it pressing like a nightmare on his chest. It was one thing to read at Port Said about the American trappers who killed the red-skinned Indians by the dozens in the Wild West, and another thing to do likewise one's self, and to see men who were alive a short time before expiring in their last bloody agony. "Yes, certainly Nell is very much terrified, and she will always continue to have that feeling of repugnance. I am sure that she will fear me," thought Stasch; "but in her heart of hearts she will unconsciously never forget to think ill of what I have done—and that is to be my reward for all I have done for her."

His heart was bowed down by these thoughts, because he knew very well that if it were not for Nell he would have been killed or have fled long ago. Therefore it was for her sake that he had suffered so much hunger and pain, which only resulted in her standing there frightened, changed, entirely different from the little sister she was before, and who now raised her eyes to his with the old confiding look gone, and in its stead an expression of intense fear. Stasch suddenly felt very unhappy. For the first time in his life he realized what it was to be moved; unconsciously the tears started to his eyes, and if it had not been for the fact that it was not at all the proper thing for a fierce warrior to weep, he would most likely have

done so, but he controlled himself, turned to the girl, and asked:

"Nell, are you afraid?"

And she answered softly:

"It is really—so terrible!"

Then Stasch told Kali to bring the rugs that lay under the saddles, and after placing one of them over the stones on which he had dozed before, he stretched out the second one on the ground and said:

"Sit down here by me near the fire; the night is cold, isn't it? If you are very sleepy, rest your little head on me and go to sleep."

And Nell could only answer:

"It is really too dreadful."

Stasch wrapped her up tenderly and carefully in the shawl, and then they sat there silently for a while, leaning against each other, and illuminated by the ruddy firelight, which flickered on the rocks and shone on the mica scales that studded the slope of the cliff.

From the other side of the hedge the neighing of the horses could be heard, and now and again the sound of munching, as they chewed the grass between their teeth.

"Listen, Nell," began Stasch; "I was obliged to do what I did. If the lion had not been satisfied in going for Kali, but had followed our party instead, Gebhr threatened to stab us. Do you understand? Now remember that he did not only threaten me, but you also, and he would have executed his threat, too. I will

236 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

frankly tell you that if this threat had not been made I would not have shot them even when I did, though I had long contemplated it. I believe I would not have done it otherwise. But Gebhr drove me to the limit. Did you see how he tortured Kali and Chamis; how in the meanest way he betrayed us and sold us? But have you the least idea what would have happened if they had not found Smain? Gebhr would then have continually tortured me as well as you. It is awful to think that he beat you daily with the currycomb, and would have tortured us both slowly to death, and after our deaths would have returned to Fashoda and said that we had died of the fever. Nell, I did not do it to be cruel, but I had to think of how I could save you. I was only troubled on your account."

And in his face there were many traces of the sadness that filled his heart. Nell saw and understood this clearly, for she drew up closer to him. But he fought against the momentary emotion and continued:

"I shall certainly not change, and I shall protect and guide you as before; but as long as they were alive there was no hope of delivery. Now we can flee to Abyssinia. The Abyssinians are black and savage, but are Christians and are also enemies of the Dervishes. If you keep well we shall succeed, as it is not very far to Abyssinia. And even if we should not succeed, even if we should fall into Smain's hands, do not fear that he will take revenge on us. He

has never in his life seen Gebhr or the Bedouins; he has seen Chamis only, but what has Chamis to do with him? In fact, we must not even tell Smain that Chamis was with us. If we succeed in reaching Abyssinia we are saved, and if not, even then you would be better off than now, for surely there are no more monsters like these in the world. Nell, dear, don't be afraid of me."

And to gain her confidence, and at the same time encourage her, he began to stroke her golden hair. The girl listened, at the same time raising her eyes shyly to his, for it was evident that she wanted to say something, but held back, hesitated, and felt afraid to speak. At last she bent her little head down so far that her hair completely hid her tiny face, and in even softer tones than before she said:

"Stasch, dear!"

"What, my dearest!"

"And they—they will not return?"

"Who?" asked Stasch, surprised.

"Those—the killed."

"Nell, what are you saying?"

"I am frightened—I am afraid."

And her pale lips began to tremble.

Silence reigned. Stasch did not believe that the dead could return to life, but as it was night and their corpses lay quite near, he did feel a little uneasy. Cold chills went down his back.

"Nell, what are you saying?" he repeated.

238 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Dinah must have taught you to be afraid of the spirits of the dead."

He did not finish the sentence, because at this moment something terrible happened. Suddenly through the dead silence of the night there rang forth from out the depths of the gorge, from the place where the dead bodies lay, an extraordinary, unearthly, terrible laughter, betokening despair, joy, cruelty, sorrow, sobs, and derision—the convulsive, spasmodic laughter of a lunatic or of a condemned man.

Nell shrieked and flung her arms round Stasch, and his hair stood on end. Saba got up suddenly and began to growl.

But Kali alone, who was quietly sitting near them, raised his head calmly and said reassuringly:

"The hyenas are laughing over Gebhr and the lion."

CHAPTER II

THE important experience of the day, now ended, and the impressions of that night, had so completely exhausted Stasch and Nell that when at last they were overcome by sleep they both slept so soundly that the girl only made her appearance outside the tent about mid-day; but Stasch arose somewhat earlier from the rug that was stretched in front of the fire, and while waiting for his little companion, he ordered Kali to prepare breakfast,

which, on account of the lateness of the hour, was to serve at the same time for dinner.

The bright daylight drove away the apparitions of the night, and both awoke not only rested in body, but also refreshed in mind. Nell looked better and felt stronger, and as both wished to leave the place where the Sudanese who had been shot remained, they mounted their horses immediately after their meal and rode away.

Generally at this time of day all travelers in Africa take their mid-day rest, and even the caravans of negroes take shelter under the shade of large trees; these are, you know, the so-called "white hours"—hours of heat and silence—during which the sun shines unmercifully, looking down from the sky as though seeking for some one to kill. Every animal crawls back into the bushes, the song of the bird ceases, the humming of the insect stops, all nature sinks into utter stillness and hides, as though protecting itself from a cruel master. But they rode along the gorge, one of the walls of which threw a dark shadow, so they could go forward without exposing themselves to the heat. Stasch did not want to leave the gorge for the simple reason that if on top they could be seen from afar by Smain's division, and also because in the hollows of the rocks it would be easier for them to find water, which trickled through the openings in the ground or dissolved into mist under the influence of the

rays of the sun. The road always led imperceptibly up hill. On the walls of the cliffs could be seen deposits of sulphur from time to time; in consequence of which the water in the crevices smelt of it, and this reminded the two children very disagreeably of Omdurman and the Mahdists, who rubbed their heads with a mixture of sulphur and grease.

In other places came the musky odor of civet-cats, and cascades of lianas hung from high promontories down to the bed of the gorge, spreading a sickening smell of vanilla.

The little travelers were glad to halt in the shadow of these embroidered curtains of purple flowers, whose leaves served as food for the horses. There were no animals to be seen, except from time to time monkeys squatted on the edges of the rocks, like silhouettes against the sky—resembling fantastic African idols or the figures that adorn the corners of temples in India. These overgrown men with manes showed Saba their teeth, screwed up their mouths to show their astonishment and anger, and at the same time hopped, blinked their eyes, and scratched their backs. But Saba, being quite accustomed to seeing them, paid little attention to their threats.

They now made rapid progress. Joy over their regained freedom drove from Stasch's breast the nightmare that had frightened him during the night. Now he was only disturbed by the thought as to what course he

should take and how he could guide Nell and himself out of this place, in which a new imprisonment by the Dervishes threatened them, what course they could plan to aid them during the long journey through the desert to keep them from perishing of hunger and thirst, and lastly, in what direction they should direct their steps. Stasch remembered that, when with Hatim, he heard that the distance from Fashoda to the frontier of Abyssinia was not more than five days' journey as the bird flies, and he reckoned that this would be about one hundred English miles. But it was now two weeks since they left Fashoda; it was therefore certain that they had not taken the shortest way, but that the search after Smain had led them much farther south. He remembered that on the sixth day of the journey they passed a river which was not the Nile, and that then, before the ground had become hilly, they had ridden past great swamps.

In the school at Port Said the geography of Africa was very thoroughly and carefully taught, and Stasch remembered that in describing Ballors mention was made of an almost unknown stream that ran through swampy land—the Soba River—and flowed into the Nile. He was not quite sure whether or not they had passed by this particular stream, but at any rate he thought they had. He also remembered that when Smain wanted to capture slaves he did not seek them in the eastern extremity of

242 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Fashoda, as the people of that district had been destroyed by the Dervishes and the smallpox; but he preferred the road toward the south, in districts which had not been discovered by previous expeditions. Therefore Stasch concluded that they were probably following in Smain's tracks. This thought at first frightened him, and he began to consider whether they ought not to desert the gorge, which it was plain continued toward the south, and march straight toward the east.

But after some consideration he gave up the idea; on the contrary, thought he, the safest course would be to follow the footsteps of Smain's company at a distance of two or three days behind them, for it was quite uncertain whether Smain with his merchandise of human beings would return by the same route instead of taking the straight course toward the Nile. Stasch also knew that Abyssinia could be reached only from the south, where this country borders the desert, and not by the eastern frontier, which was strictly guarded by Dervishes. Consequently he decided to advance as far as possible toward the south.

One might very likely come across negroes there, either those who had settled there or those who had taken refuge there from the banks of the White Nile. But if he had to choose between the two evils, Stasch would rather deal with the blacks than with the Mahdists; besides he also reckoned that, in case

they should strike fugitives or settlers, Kali and Mea could be of assistance to him. A mere glance at the negress showed that she belonged to the tribe of Dinka or Schilluk, for she had exceptionally long, thin legs and large feet, which are typical of both these tribes, which live on the banks of the Nile and wade through its bed like storks and cranes. Kali, on the contrary, although he had become as thin as a skeleton when in Gebhr's hands, now presented quite a different aspect. He was small and heavily built, had strong arms, and, in comparison with Mea, proportionately short legs and small feet.

As Kali did not understand a word of Arabian, and only spoke the Ki-swahili language very badly (a knowledge of which will make one understood nearly everywhere throughout Africa, and which Stasch had practically learned from the Zanzibar negroes working on the canal), it was evident that he came from some remote district.

Stasch therefore decided to ask him where he did come from.

"Kali, what is the name of your nation?" he inquired.

"Wa-hima," the young negro answered.

"Is it a great nation?"

"A very great one, which wages war with the wicked Samburu, and captures their cattle."

"And where is your village?"

244 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Far away, far away—Kali does not know where it is."

"In a land like this?"

"No. In that country there is a great body of water and also mountains."

"What is the name of this sheet of water?"

"We call it 'The Great Water.'"

Stasch thought that perhaps the boy had come from the Albert Nyanza district, which until the present time was in Emin Pasha's hands, and to make sure of this he inquired further.

"Doesn't a white chief live there who has black smoking ships and soldiers?"

"No; the old people tell us that they have seen white people," and with this Kali raised his fingers, counting one, two, three. "Kali has never seen them, because he was not born there, but Kali's father received them and gave them many cows."

"What is your father?"

"King of the Wa-hima."

Stasch was not a little flattered at the thought that he had a prince for his servant.

"Would you like to see your father?"

"Kali wants to see his mother."

"And what would you do if we met Wa-hima people? And what would they do?"

"The Wa-hima would fall on their faces before Kali."

"Then conduct us to them and you can stay

with them and reign as your father's heir, and we will ride on toward the sea."

"Kali will not meet them and will not stay there, for Kali loves the 'Great Man' and the 'Daughter of the Moon.' "

Stasch turned round cheerfully to his companion and said:

"Nell, you have become a Daughter of the Moon."

But as he looked at her he suddenly became sad, for it struck him that the little maid, who had suffered greatly from the fatigue of the journey, with her pale, transparent face in reality looked more like an inhabitant of the moon than a dweller on this earth.

The young negro also remained silent for a moment, then he continued:

"Kali loves Bwana Kubwa, for Bwana Kubwa did not kill Kali—only Gebhr killed him—he gave Kali plenty to eat."

And he stroked his chest and stomach and repeated with visible delight:

"Plenty of meat, plenty of meat."

Stasch would have liked to find out how the boy had been imprisoned by the Dervishes, but it turned out that on a certain night after he had been captured in one of the trenches dug to entrap zebras, he had already been through so many hands that one could not decide from his answer through what countries and by what route he had at last reached Fashoda. Stasch was impressed by what he said about the "Great

Water," for if he had come from the district of Albert Nyanza, Albert Edward Nyanza, or even from the Victoria Nyanza, round which the kingdoms of Unyoro and Uganda lie, he would undoubtedly have heard something of Emin Pasha, his soldiers, and steamers, which raised consternation and fear in the minds of the negroes. The Tanganyika was too far distant, and so the only supposition that remained was that Kali's race must have its home somewhere in the vicinity of the waters of Rudolf and Stefanie. These lands were also fairly remote, but the expedition was at least half way on its journey, so while the lands could not be said to be very near Fashoda, still they were near the place where the travelers now were—and it was quite possible that they might meet the Wa-hima.

After a ride of many hours the sun began to set, and the heat had abated considerably. They reached a wide plain, where there was water and where wild figs grew, so they made a halt to give the horses a rest and to refresh themselves with food. As the walls of the cliffs were lower at this point, Stasch ordered Kali to climb up and look around to see if there was any smoke.

Kali obeyed, and was soon on the edge of the cliffs. He carefully noticed everything on all sides and then slid down on a thick liana, and said that there was no smoke, but "Nyama." It was easy to guess that he did not mean birds,

but some kind of big game, for he pointed to Stasch's rifle and then put his finger to his head as a sign that they were horned animals.

Then Stasch climbed the height, and carefully raising his head over the edge of the cliff, began to look around.

Nothing interrupted the view, for the high jungle had been destroyed by fire, and the new one, shooting forth from the charred earth, was scarcely a foot high. All around as far as eye could reach were scattered tall trees still growing, whose trunks had been scorched by the flames. In the shade of one of these trees a herd of antelope was grazing, their bodies resembling horses and their heads buffaloes. The sunlight peering through the branches made bright spots of light on their brown backs.

There were nine of them, and they were not more than a hundred feet away. As the wind was blowing from the animals toward the ravine, they continued feeding quietly, fearing no danger. Stasch, who was desirous of providing meat for the caravan, fired upon the nearest animal, which fell as though struck by lightning. The others fled, and with them a huge buffalo, which they had not seen before, because it had been hidden by a large stone. The boy's pride as a huntsman was aroused, and waiting for the animal to turn round, he sent a bullet through it. The buffalo swayed heavily as soon as it was hit, and ran off; and before Stasch was able to change his cartridges

248 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

it had disappeared behind a hillock. Before the smoke had cleared away Kali ran to the antelope and ripped it open with Gebhr's knife. Stasch went up to him to get a nearer view of the animal, and was much surprised when the young negro took the liver of the antelope, which was still warm, in his blood-stained hands and presented it to him.

"Why do you give it to me?" said he.

"Msuri! Msuri! Bwana Kubwa, eat now."

"Eat it yourself," answered Stasch, disgusted at the suggestion.

Kali did not wait to be told twice. He at once began to tear the liver to pieces with his teeth and greedily swallow the raw bits. But seeing that Stasch looked at him with disgust, he did not stop between mouthfuls, but continually repeated, "Msuri! Msuri!"

After Kali had eaten more than half the liver, he began skinning the antelope, which he did very quickly and so dexterously that the skin was soon removed. Stasch was surprised that Saba was not there to help in this work, so he whistled to invite him to the feast.

Saba did not come, but Kali, who was bending over the antelope, looked up and said:

"The big dog has gone after the buffalo."

"Did you see him?" said Stasch.

"Kali saw it."

As he said this he lifted the body of the antelope with both hands, and placing it upon his shoulder, he went off toward the gorge.

Stasch whistled once more and waited, but as he found that it was of no avail, he followed Kali. In the gorge they found Mea busily cutting thorns from the hedge, and Nell, who was plucking their last bird with her tiny fingers, said:

"Did you whistle for Saba? He ran after you."

"He ran after a buffalo which I shot and I am worried about him," answered Stasch. "These animals are so large and powerful that even a lion is afraid to attack them. If Saba should try to fight one of them he would fare badly."

When Nell heard this she was worried also, and declared that she would not go to bed until Saba returned. When Stasch saw how grieved she was he felt angry with himself for not having concealed the danger from her, and he tried to console her.

"I would have followed them with my rifle, but now they must be far away; besides, night is approaching and their trail can not be seen. The buffalo was hit squarely, and I hope it will fall. At any rate, it will be so much exhausted from loss of blood that even if it were to fall upon Saba, the dog could run away in time. Yes, he may not return till night, but he will surely return."

Stasch himself did not believe what he said, because he remembered what he had heard about the vindictiveness of the African buffalo,

250 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

which, even when severely wounded, runs round in a circle and watches to see which way the hunter goes, so as to attack him unawares, tossing him high in the air with its horns. Quite likely Saba might have met with a similar fate, besides other dangers to which he might be subjected in his journey by night.

As soon as it had become dark Kali and Mea managed to make a hedge fence, light a fire, and get supper ready. But even then there was no sign of Saba.

Nell became very uneasy and began to cry. Stasch insisted on her lying down and going to sleep, and he promised her to wait up for Saba and to look for him and bring him back as soon as daylight appeared. Nell entered the tent, but thrust out her little head continually to inquire if the dog had returned. She did not fall asleep till after midnight, when Mea left the tent to relieve Kali, who until now had watched by the fire.

"Why does the Daughter of the Moon cry?" asked Kali, and Stasch, as they both lay down on thin wooden benches to sleep, said:

"She is worried, fearing that Saba is killed by the buffalo."

"Perhaps he has killed it," answered the young negro.

Then they stopped talking and Stasch went fast asleep. He awoke while it was still dark because it had become colder. Mea, who was supposed to be on the watch, had fallen asleep,

and so it had been some time since she had put dry wood on the expiring flames.

No one was lying upon the felt quilt on which Kali had slept.

Stasch threw firewood on the glowing ashes, nudged the negress and asked:

"Where's Kali?"

For a time she stared at him as though in a trance, and then, when wide awake, she said:

"Kali has taken Gebhr's knife and gone outside of the hedge. I thought he went to get more wood for the fire, but he has not returned yet."

"Has he been gone a long while?"

"Yes, a long while."

Stasch waited some time, but as the negro did not return, he reluctantly asked himself, "Could he have run away?"

He felt a pain in his heart like that experienced by those who have met with ingratitude. He had befriended Kali and protected him when Gebhr tortured him daily, and had eventually saved his life. Nell always liked him, she wept over his misfortunes, and they both were as kind as could be to him, and yet he had now run away! He often said that he had no idea in which direction the settlements of the Wa-hima lay, and that he could not find his way there—and still he had run away.

Stasch again remembered the description of travels in Africa which he had read in Port Said, the accounts of the travelers, the stupid-

252 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

ity of the negroes in throwing away the luggage and deserting—for even if threatened with the punishment of certain death they did so just the same. Evidently Kali, whose only weapon was a Sudanese sword, would succumb to starvation or be recaptured by the Der-vishes, unless devoured by wild beasts.

“Oh, the ungrateful wretch! And what a fool!”

Stasch seriously began to think how much more difficult the journey would be for them without Kali and how much more heavily the work would fall on the others. To water the horses and tie them for the night, to put up the tent and the hedge, to guard the luggage and to see that the provisions were not lost, to skin and cut up the slain animals, all duties which Kali had performed, would, through loss of the negro, fall to his share, and he was obliged to confess to himself that he had no definite idea how to do many of these things, as, for instance, skinning animals.

“Well, what else can I do?” said he. “It will have to be done.”

Meanwhile the sun appeared above the horizon, and, as is always the case at the equator, it was daylight in a minute. A little after this the water in the tent, that Mea had prepared for the little lady to wash in, began to splash, by which Stasch knew that Nell had arisen and that she was dressing. Somewhat later she appeared completely dressed, but with

her comb in her hands and her hair not arranged.

"What about Saba?" asked she.

"He has not returned yet."

The corners of the girl's mouth began to tremble.

"Perhaps he will come back yet," said Stasch. "You remember that sometimes in the desert he was missing for two whole days, and yet he always came back to us."

"You said that you were going to look for him."

"I can't."

"Why not, Stasch?"

"Because it is impossible for me to leave you alone with Mea."

"And Kali?"

"Kali is not here."

He drew back, debating with himself whether or not he ought to tell her the whole truth; but as it would be impossible to hide it, he concluded that it would be better to tell her everything.

"Kali has taken Gebhr's sword," he said, "and he went away during the night, no one knows where. Who can tell? He may have run away. Negroes often do this, even to their own detriment. I am sorry—but perhaps he will now see that he has acted foolishly and——"

The next words were drowned by Saba's joyful bark, which penetrated the gorge. Nell

threw down the comb and tried to run toward him, but the thorns in the hedge prevented her.

Stasch at once began to tear down a part of the hedge, but before he had succeeded in even making a passage Saba appeared, and behind him Kali, shining and wet with dew as though soaked through by a very heavy shower.

Both children were overcome with joy, and as soon as Kali, who was so fatigued from his exertions that he could scarcely get his breath, reached the inside of the hedge, Nell threw her little arms around his black neck, hugging him tight.

"Kali does not like to see the Bibi cry," he said, "so Kali looked for the dog and found him."

"Good Kali," cried Stasch, patting him on the shoulder; "and were you not afraid that you would meet a lion or a leopard during the night?"

"Kali afraid, but Kali go," answered the young man.

These words endeared him still more to the children. At Nell's request Stasch took from one of the bundles a string of glass beads which the Greek Kaliopuli had given them when they left Omdurman, and placed them around Kali's neck. He was delighted with the gift, and looking proudly at Mea, said:

"Mea has no glass beads, but Kali has, for Kali is 'Great World.'"

In this way the sacrifice of the black boy was

rewarded. Saba, on the contrary, received a severe reprimand, from which he was made to understand for the second time during the period he had been with Nell, that he was very naughty and that if he ever did such a thing again he would be led by a leash like a small dog. He listened to this sermon while wagging his tail with rather a double meaning. But Nell was sure that she saw by the expression of his eyes that he was ashamed, and that he had really blushed for shame, but that could not be perceived, because his cheeks were covered with hair.

Then breakfast followed, and during this meal Kali recounted his adventures, and Stasch translated them into English for Nell, who did not understand the Ki-swahili language. It so happened that the buffalo had run very far off, and it had been difficult for Kali to find his trail, for there was no moon that night. As good luck would have it, it had rained two days before, and the earth was not very hard; therefore the feet of the heavy animal had made their impress in the wet earth. Kali searched for the trail by observing the cleft in the hoofs, and followed his footprints for some time. At last the buffalo stumbled and must have fallen over dead, for there were no traces of a struggle between him and Saba. When Kali found them Saba had already eaten the largest part of one of his forefeet, but although he could not eat any more himself, he would not permit

two hyenas and several jackals, that stood round and waited until the stronger animal of prey had had his fill and gone away, to approach the meat.

The boy complained that the dog had even growled at him, but then he threatened him with the displeasure of the "Great Man" and "Bibi," caught him by the collar, dragged him away from the buffalo, and did not let him loose until he reached the gorge.

With this, the story of Kali's adventures by night ended, then they all mounted their horses and rode on contentedly.

All but the long-legged Mea, who, although quiet and submissive, looked enviously at the necklace adorning the throat of the young negro and on Saba's collar, and thought sadly to herself:

"They are both 'Great World,' but I have only a ring on one foot."

CHAPTER III

DURING the three following days they continually traveled through the gorge and, as it so happened, always up hill. The days were unusually warm, the nights alternately cold and sultry. The rainy season was approaching; here and there milk-white clouds heavy with rain hung low down close to the horizon. Occasionally strips of rain could be seen, and far off was a rainbow. On the morn-

ing of the third day one of these clouds burst over their heads like a broken cask whose hoops had sprung and deluged them with warm rain, but as good luck would have it, it did not last long, and then the weather was fine once more, and they were able to continue their journey.

Now birds appeared in such quantities that Stasch could shoot and bring down five of them without dismounting, which more than sufficed for one meal and also enough for Saba. Riding in the brisk air was not at all fatiguing, and a quantity of wild game and plenty of water removed all fear of hunger and thirst. They were getting along so well that Stasch was always good-natured, and while riding by the side of the girl he talked cheerfully with her, and even joked occasionally.

"Nell, do you know," said he, as they halted for a short time under a big breadfruit tree, from which Kali and Mea cut off large melon-shaped fruits, "it sometimes seems to me as though I were a wandering knight."

"And what is a wandering knight?" asked Nell, turning her pretty little face toward him:

"A long, long time ago, in the Middle Ages, there were such knights, who rode about the country looking for adventures. They fought with giants and dragons—and do you know each one had his lady, whom he protected and defended."

"And am I such a lady?"

Stasch thought a moment and then answered:

"No; you are too young for that. Those ladies were grown up——"

And the idea never struck him that perhaps never had wandering knight ever served lady so faithfully as he had his little sister. He took everything that he had done for her as a matter of course.

But Nell felt hurt by his words, and screwing up her mouth into a pout, she said:

"You once told me in the desert that I acted like a big girl of thirteen. Ah!"

"Only once; but you are merely eight years old."

"But in ten years I shall be eighteen."

"Oh, that is a great while off, and then I shall be twenty-four, but at that age a man does not think about any lady, for he has something quite different to think of then; that is very evident."

"And what are you going to do?"

"By that time I shall be an engineer or a mariner, or, if war were to break out in Poland, I should travel there, to fight as my father fought."

Then she asked uneasily:

"But will you positively return to Port Said?"

"For the present we both must return there."

"To our little papa," sighed the girl.

And immediately her eyes were veiled by

sadness and homesickness. As good luck would have it, a swarm of beautiful gray parrots, with pink heads and rose-colored down under their wings, flew toward them. The children immediately forgot what they had been talking about, and their eyes followed the flight of the birds.

The flock of parrots flew over a group of Euphorbia and came down upon a neighboring sycamore, through the branches of which could be heard voices that sounded like a chattering council, or a terrible quarrel.

"These are the parrots that learn to speak the most readily," said Stasch. "As soon as we make a longer halt I will do my best to try to catch one for you."

"Oh, Stasch, I thank you," cried Nell joyfully. "I will call him 'Daisy.'"

Mea and Kali, who meanwhile had been plucking the fruit from a breadfruit tree, now loaded up the horses with them, and the little caravan continued on its way.

In the afternoon it clouded over again, and several times there was a short shower that filled all the crevices in the ground with water. Kali prophesied a heavy storm, and it occurred to Stasch that in this case the gorge, which had become narrower and narrower, would not be a safe resting-place for the night, as it would most likely become the bed of the stream. So he decided to spend the night above the gorge, and Nell was delighted at this, especially when

260 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Kali, who had been sent out to reconnoiter, returned, announcing that not far from where they were was a forest of many kinds of trees, in which little monkeys were disporting themselves; but these monkeys were not ugly and vicious as those they had seen before. Therefore as soon as they struck a place where the walls of the cliff were low and not too steep they led the horses up, and when it was dark they prepared for night. Nell's tent was put up in a somewhat higher and drier place underneath a large ant-hill, which completely barred the entrance from one side and strengthened the hedge that led toward it.

In the vicinity stood an enormous tree with wide-spreading branches and heavy foliage, which would shelter them sufficiently from the rain. In front of the hedge grew scattered groups of trees, and further off was a dense woods filled with underbrush, above which could be seen the tops of strange palms resembling giant fans spread out like the tail of a peacock.

Stasch learned from Kali that before the beginning of the second rainy season—that is in autumn—it is dangerous to spend the night under these palms, because the huge fruit ripens, breaks off when least expected, and falls from its great height with such force that it might kill a human being, or even a horse. But at the present time the fruit had not matured. Before the sun went down little

monkeys could be seen in the distance scrambling and playfully chasing one another in the tree-tops.

Stasch and Kali collected a sufficient quantity of wood for the night, and as occasional heavy waves of hot air blew toward them, they fastened down the hedge with pegs, which the young negro whittled with Gebhr's sword, and drove into the ground. This precaution was very necessary, for the strong wind might break and tear down the thorn branches out of which the hedge was made, and thus make it easy for wild animals to attack them.

Soon after the sun went down the wind stopped suddenly, but on the other hand the air had become heavy and sultry. In the spaces between the clouds stars appeared occasionally, but later complete darkness settled down, so that one could hardly see a foot in advance. The little wanderers grouped themselves around the fire and listened to the chatter and screams of the monkeys, which were making a perfect pandemonium. In the neighboring woods the howls of the jackals and other strange sounds—through which could be heard the restlessness and the fear of that which under the veil of darkness in the wilderness threatens every human being—united to form an appropriate accompaniment.

Suddenly the stillness became intense, and in the darkness the growl of a lion was heard.

The horses, which were grazing nearby in

262 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the short jungle grass, began to approach the light of the fire by hopping with their chained front feet, and even then the hair of Saba, who was usually so courageous, bristled, and he crouched in front of his master with his tail drawn down, obviously seeking protection. The growl sounded again, this time as if coming from the bowels of the earth; it was a deep, heavy, long-drawn sigh, as if the animal had let it out of its powerful lungs with difficulty. The sound rolled on glidingly close to the ground, sometimes louder, sometimes softer, then becoming a deep, hollow, unearthly sigh.

"Kali, put more wood on the fire," cried Stasch.

The negro threw an armful of branches on the fire with such haste and force that at first nothing but sparks ascended; then the flame blazed forth.

"The lion will not attack us, will he, Stasch?" whispered Nell, pulling the boy by the sleeve.

"No, he will not attack us. Look how high the hedge is——"

As he said this he positively thought that they were in no danger, but still he was worried about the horses, which pressed nearer and nearer the hedge and threatened to tread it down.

Meanwhile the sighing changed into a long-drawn-out thundering roar, enough to terrify any human being, for even creatures who know no fear tremble from head to foot, shaking

like panes of glass at the report of far-off cannon.

Stasch threw a hurried glance at Nell, and seeing her quivering mouth and moist eyes, he said:

"Don't be frightened. Don't cry."

She answered under a great strain:

"I don't want to cry, but my eyes perspire so—oh!"

The last scream escaped from her lips because at that moment a second roar, far more powerful and much nearer than the first, rang out from the forest. The horses began to push themselves still nearer the hedge, and if the long, steel-like prickles of the acacia branches had not hindered them they would have broken through. Saba growled and trembled like an ivy leaf, and Kali began to repeat in a broken voice:

"Sir! Two! Two! Two!"

As the lions were now responding to each other, they continued to roar, and this awful concert kept up for some time in the darkness, for as soon as one of the animals ceased the other began. Stasch was unable to distinguish from what direction their voices came, for the echoes repeated them over and over in the gorge and reverberated from cliff to cliff, sounded above and beneath, filled the forest and the jungle, saturating the darkness with thunder and with fear.

Only one thing seemed to the boy to be quite

264 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

certain, and that was that the beasts were surely approaching. Kali also noticed that the lions were creeping round the bivouac, approaching in smaller circles, and he also noticed that, being kept from attacking them by the fire, they were expressing their displeasure and fear by emitting these dreadful sounds.

He also seemed to think that only the horses were in danger, for he said, as he counted on his fingers:

"The lions will kill one, two; not all, not all!"

"Throw wood on the fire," repeated Stasch.

Again a bigger flame burst forth, and suddenly the roars ceased. But Kali raised his head and began to listen.

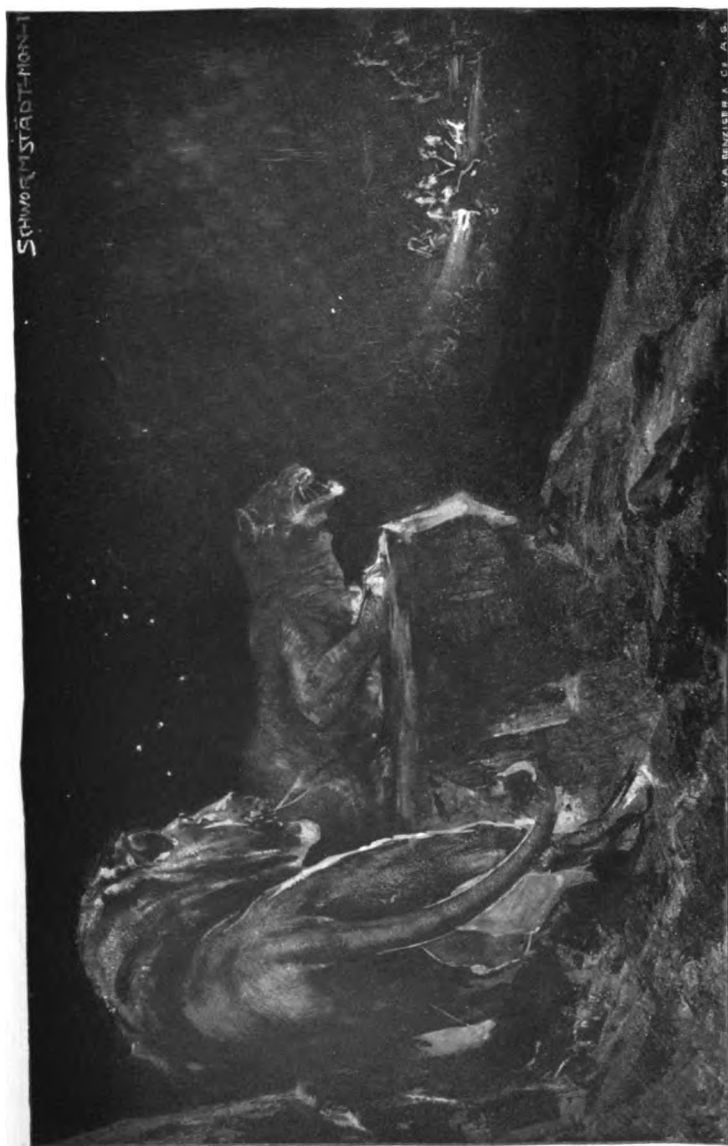
"What's the matter?" asked Stasch.

"Rain——" answered the negro.

Now Stasch also pricked up his ears. The branches of the trees served as a roof for the tent, and also for the entire hedge, and therefore not a single drop fell to the ground, but it could be heard pattering on the leaves above them.

As there was not a breath of even the sultry air stirring, it was easy to conjecture that it was pouring in the thicket.

The sound increased moment by moment, and after a little while the children perceived drops descending from the leaves, drops of rain that looked like large rosy pearls in the fire-light. As Kali had prophesied, a terrific storm



"A second roar, far more powerful and much nearer than the first, rang out from the forest. The echoes filled the jungle, saturating the darkness with thunder and fear."—PAGE 263.

THROUGH THE DESERT 265

had come up. The sound of the storm increased until it became a wild roar. Rain fell faster and faster, and at last great streams of water penetrated the thicket. The fire was going out. Kali threw on fagots to no effect. The wet branches only smoldered, the blackened wood beneath crackled, and after a feeble flicker the flames died away.

"Though the pelting rain drown the fire, the hedge will still protect us," said Stasch to calm Nell.

Then he led the little girl within the tent and covered her with a shawl, after which he went out again at once, for he heard a short roar. This time it seemed much nearer, and in it there was a note of triumph.

Every second the storm increased. The raindrops pelted the foliage like shot. Had not the fire been protected by the branches it would have gone out at once, but soon there arose only heavy smoke, through which narrow blue flames shot up here and there. Kali thought that the fire was about out, and so did not throw any more fagots on it. Instead, he quickly swung a rope round the tree, and with its aid soon climbed higher and higher.

"What are you doing?" asked Stasch.

"Kali climbs up the tree."

"Why?" he screamed, angry at the boy's selfishness.

A vivid flash of lightning shot through the darkness, and Kali's answer was drowned by

266 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

a clap of thunder which shook the heavens and the wilderness. At the same time a hurricane broke forth that tore the branches off the trees and in a second swept over the place where the fire had been and carried away the glowing pieces of wood which remained under the ashes, and flung them, like fiery, sparkling sheafs, into the jungle.

The next moment an impenetrable darkness enveloped the camp. The terrible equatorial storm raged in the heavens and on the earth. Claps of thunder and flashes of lightning followed one another in rapid succession. The vivid forks of lightning tore wildly through the somberness of the black sky. On the nearby cliff a strange-looking blue ball was seen; for a time it rolled along the gorge, then flamed up into dazzling brilliancy, exploding with such a terrible report that it seemed as if the very rocks must be crushed to powder by the shock. Then, as before, perfect silence reigned.

Stasch was worried on Nell's account, and he groped his way toward the tent, which was still standing, being protected by the ant-hill and the immense tree trunk; nevertheless the next gust of wind might be heavier and break the ropes and carry it away, heaven knows where. The storm abated at times, then increased, and rivers of rain and masses of broken twigs, branches, and foliage from the neighboring woods came thundering down.

Stasch was nearly at his wits' end. He did not know whether he ought to leave Nell in the tent or take her out. In the first case she might become entangled in the ropes and be carried off with the tent-canvas; on the other hand, she stood a chance of getting thoroughly drenched and being carried away in addition, for even Stasch, though much stronger than she, was scarcely able to keep his own footing.

This desperate situation was at last solved by the whirlwind, which soon carried off the top of the tent, and now the canvas walls offered no further protection. There was nothing to do but to wait in the impenetrable darkness, surrounded by two lions, for the storm to abate.

Stasch thought that perhaps these animals had also sought shelter from the storm in the nearby forest, but he was quite sure that they would return after the rain had ceased, and the awful predicament was made worse by the fact that the hurricane had also demolished the hedge.

Everything threatened destruction. Stasch's rifle was useless, and he had no scope for his energy. Face to face with the storm, the lightning, the tempest, the rain, the darkness, and the lions, he felt himself defenseless, helpless. The canvas walls, beaten by the hurricane, drenched them on all sides, so Stasch threw his arm around Nell and guided her outside the tent; then they both clung to the tree trunk

268 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

and there waited either death or the merciful help of heaven.

But now suddenly between the blasts of wind came the voice of Kali, which could scarcely be heard above the pattering of the rain.

"Ah! ah! Up the tree! Up the tree!"

And immediately a wet rope let down from above touched the boy's shoulder.

"Fasten Bibi to it. Kali will draw her up!" cried the negro again.

Stasch did not hesitate a minute. He rolled Nell up in the canvas, so that the rope could not cut her, bound it tightly round her body, lifted her up with outstretched arms, and cried, "Pull!"

There happened to be some low branches on the tree, so Nell's journey through the air was not long. Kali soon caught her in his strong arms and deposited her between the tree trunk and an enormous branch, which was roomy enough for half a dozen more such tiny beings as she. No blast of wind could blow her down from the tree, and although the water ran down the tree in a stream, the trunk, which was more than ten feet thick, protected her at least from those sheets of water which the tempest drove obliquely toward them.

After the negro had brought the little "Bibi" to this place of safety, he let the rope down for Stasch, but he, like a captain who is the last to leave his sinking ship, ordered Mea to climb up before him.

Kali's help was unnecessary, for she swung herself up in a minute with skill and agility, as though she were the sister of a chimpanzee. It was a more difficult feat for Stasch, but still he was sufficiently trained in gymnastics to overcome the weight of his own body, which was increased by the rifle and the cartridges, with which he had hastily filled his pockets.

In a short time they were all in the tree. Stasch had become so accustomed to think always of Nell first, that he now set about at once to see that she stood in no danger of falling off, ascertaining if she had room enough, and whether she could lie down comfortably. Satisfied in these respects, he began racking his brains as to how he could shelter her from the storm. But there was not much hope that he would be successful in this. To erect a small roof over their heads would have been easy work during the day, but now the darkness surrounding them was so intense that they could not even see each other. If the storm would only abate they could light a fire to dry Nell's clothes.

Stasch was in despair, thinking that the child, who was drenched to the skin, would surely have her first attack of fever the following day. He was afraid that it might be cold in the early morning after the storm, as had been the case after the previous nights, though the blasts of wind and the rain during the other storms had been warm. Stasch was

270 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

only surprised at its duration, for he knew that equatorial storms are the fiercer in proportion to their speed in passing. It was a long time before the thunder ceased and the wind calmed down a little, but even then it continued to rain, not so heavily as before, but still the rain-drops were so heavy and dense that the foliage offered absolutely no shelter. From beneath them could be heard the roaring of waters, as if the whole jungle were converted into a sea. Stasch shuddered, thinking that they would surely be destroyed in the gorge. He also thought of what might have happened to Saba, and this made him very sad, but he did not dare to talk about the dog to Nell. He cherished a fond hope that the clever animal had found a safe refuge between the rocks that overhung the gorge. At any rate, it was impossible for him to help the dog.

And so they sat there close to one another, becoming wetter and wetter under the outspread branches, and waiting for dawn. After a few hours the air began to cool off and at last the rain stopped entirely. To all appearances the water now only flowed over the edge of the promontories down into the lower regions, for no splashing or hollow roaring could be heard.

On the previous day Stasch noticed that Kali had attempted to make a fire with wet branches and the idea suddenly struck him of ordering the negro to descend and try if he could do it

again. But just as he turned toward him something happened which nearly froze the blood in the veins of all four.

A terrible, heartrending cry from the horses—a cry full of pain, surprise, and deadly fear—broke the silence of the night. Through the darkness were heard frightful sounds, then a short gurgling, followed by hollow sighs and groans, and at the very end a piercing, inexpressible sound, and then silence reigned.

"The lions! Lions kill horses!" whispered Kali.

There was something so terrible in this attack by night, in the violence of the elements, and in the sudden killing of the animals, that for a minute Stasch's blood nearly froze in his veins and he never once thought of the rifle. But what good would it do to shoot in such darkness? At best the nocturnal marauders, frightened by the light and the report of the shots, would leave the dead horses, follow those who had wandered away from the camping place as far as their bound feet would permit, and would then run away.

At the thought of what really might have happened had they stayed below, Stasch began to shudder. Nell, clinging to him, trembled as if seized by her first attack of fever. However, the tree protected them from being attacked. Doubtless it was Kali who had saved their lives.

In spite of all, however, it was a terrible

night, by far the most awful of the entire journey.

They crouched on the branches like drenched birds, and listened to what was going on below. For a while deep silence reigned, then again there were sounds denoting the tearing of large pieces of meat, the greedy smacking of lips, the gasping breath and the groans of the monsters.

The scent of raw meat and blood penetrated into the top of the tree, for the lions held their feast not further than twenty feet away from the hedge. They feasted so long that Stasch lost patience and became angry, and he took up the rifle and shot in the direction from which the noises came. A short, broken-off, angry roar was the only answer. Then once more was heard the cracking of the bones, which the animals of prey crunched between their enormous jaws. In the background the blue and red eyes of the hyenas and jackals glistened as they awaited their turn.

And so the endless hours of the night dragged on.

CHAPTER IV

AT LAST the sun rose and lighted up the jungle, the scattered groves, and the forest. The lions disappeared with the first ray of dawn. Stasch made Kali build a fire and ordered Mea to take Nell's things out of the

leather bag, in which they were packed, to dry them and change the girl's clothes as quickly as possible. He took the rifle and carefully went over the camp to see what ravages had been made by the storm and the bloodthirsty beasts.

Just behind the hedge, only the stakes of which remained, lay the first horse, nearly half devoured; some hundred feet further, a second, hardly begun; and next to it the third, with its stomach torn open and its head smashed in. They all presented a terrible sight, for in their open, glassy eyes could be seen their terror at approaching death, and their wide-open jaws displayed their strong teeth. The ground was stamped down and the cavities formed pools of blood. Stasch was so enraged that at the moment he almost wished that the disheveled head of one of the nocturnal robbers, tired out after the feast, would appear behind one of the bushes, so that he might send a bullet through it. But he was obliged to postpone his revenge at present, for he had other things to attend to.

The remaining horses had to be caught. The boy supposed that like Saba, whose carcass was nowhere to be seen, they might have hidden somewhere in the woods. The hope that the faithful fellow-sufferer had not fallen a prey to the wild animals made Stasch feel so happy that he took courage once more, and the finding of the donkey naturally increased his joy. It so happened that clever long-

274 *THROUGH THE DÉSSERT*

ears had not even taken the trouble to run far away. He had simply crept into a nook made by the ant-hill and the large tree outside the hedge, and there, with head and sides protected, he had awaited events, in readiness at any moment to repulse the attack by vigorously kicking out his hind legs. But the lions had apparently not noticed him, so when the sun rose and the danger was over he felt the necessity of lying down and taking a good rest after all the tragical events of the night.

While circling the camp Stasch at last found the impress of horses' hoofs in the moistened earth. The tracks pointed toward the woods and then turned off toward the gorge. That was fortunate, for it would not be difficult to capture horses in the narrow pass. A little further on in the grass was found a foot-chain, which one of the horses had succeeded in breaking off during its flight. This horse must have run away so far that for the present he would have to be considered lost. To offset this, Stasch discovered the other two behind a low rock, not in the ravine, but on its borders. One of them was rolling on the ground, the other grazing in the fresh green grass. Both looked very tired, as though they had run a long distance. But daylight had driven all fear from their hearts, and they greeted Stasch by neighing in a short, friendly way. The horse which was rolling on the ground sprang to his feet, which enabled the boy to see that he also had

succeeded in breaking loose from his foot-chains, but fortunately he had preferred remaining with his friend to running away aimlessly.

Stasch left both of them under the cliff and advanced to the edge of the ravine to make sure whether it were possible to continue the journey. He now saw that the heavy down-pour had been so severe that the rain had run off and the ground was nearly dry. And soon his attention was attracted by a grayish-white article, which had been caught in the vines overhanging the opposite side of the cliff. This proved to be the roof of the tent, which had been blown off and caught on the bushes; it had taken such a strong hold that the rain could not wash it away. After all, the tent offered a better shelter for Nell than the hut made of branches of trees put together hastily, and Stasch was much pleased at finding this article, which he had thought was lost.

Now his joy increased when out of a higher crevice in the cliff hidden by lianas Saba came running toward him, holding in his teeth an animal whose head and tail hung out of either side of his jaws. The huge dog climbed down in a minute and laid at Stasch's feet a striped hyena, with broken back and one foot bitten off; then he began to wag his tail and to bark cheerfully as if to say: "I must acknowledge that I took to my heels before the lion, but even you crouched like birds on the tree. And

276 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

besides, you see, I have not passed the night without accomplishing something."

And he was so proud of himself that Stasch scarcely liked to make him leave the ill-smelling carcass behind, instead of bringing it to Nell.

When they both returned they found a large fire in the bivouac, water boiling in the pots, and the meal being cooked. Nell had put on dry clothing, but she looked so pale and ill that Stasch was startled and took her hand, to make sure whether or not she was feverish.

"Nell, what is the matter?" asked he.

"Nothing, Stasch; I am only very sleepy."

"I believe it, after such a night! Thank goodness, you have cold hands. Oh, what a night that was! Of course you must be sleepy—I am sleepy, too. But don't you feel well?"

"I have a slight headache."

Stasch laid his hand on her forehead. The little head was cold like the hands, but that was a sign of unusual exhaustion and weakness, and so the boy sighed and said:

"You must now have something hot to eat, and then you must lie down and sleep until evening. At least the weather is good to-day, and not likely to be as it was yesterday."

But Nell gazed at him with terror.

"We surely are not going to spend the night here?"

"Not here, for the mangled horses are lying nearby; we will look for some other tree, or else ride down into the gorge and build a better

fence than any in the world. You will sleep as quietly as at Port Said."

But she folded her tiny hands and with tears in her eyes besought him to ride on at once, for she said that in this awful place it would be impossible for her to close her eyes and she would surely get sick.

She begged so earnestly, and as she looked into his eyes repeated over and over again, "Stasch, please!" that at last he consented to do as she wished.

"Then we will attempt to continue our journey through the gorge," said he, "for there it is shady. Only promise to tell me when your strength gives out or when you feel weak."

"It will not come to that! You can bind me to the saddle and I shall have a good sleep."

"No. I shall ride on the same horse with you. Kali and Mea will ride on the others, and the donkey will carry the tent and the luggage."

"Good! Good!"

"But as soon as breakfast is over you must take a little nap. Besides, we can not start before noon, as there are many things to be done. The horses must be caught, the tent folded, and the baggage repacked. We shall have to leave some things behind, for we have only two horses left. It will take a few hours to do all these things, and in the meantime you will have a good sleep and feel stronger. It is going to be a very warm day, but under the tree it will be shady."

278 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"And you—and Mea and Kali? I am so ashamed to be the only one to sleep while you all have so much anxiety——"

"Never mind; after a while we can sleep. Don't be worried on my account. When in Port Said I frequently, during my examinations, passed entire nights without sleep, but of course my father did not know it. My friends took no rest either. But what a man can stand is of course out of the question for a little fly like you. You have no idea how badly you look to-day—as frail as glass. Your eyes and hair are all that remain, and there is nothing left of your face."

Although he said this jokingly, in his heart he was frightened, for in broad daylight Nell really looked ill, and for the first time it occurred to him that the poor child, if she continued to look like this, not only might die, but was sure to die. At this thought his knees trembled, for he suddenly felt that in case of her death he would have no reason to live or to return to Port Said.

"For what would there be in life for me?" he continually thought.

He turned away for a minute, so that Nell should not see the look of sadness and fear in his eyes, and then he went to the baggage, which was piled up under the tree, took off the cloth which covered the cartridge-case, opened it, and began to search for something.

It was there, in a little glass phial, that he

kept the last quinine powder and guarded it as the apple of his eye for a "dark hour"; that is, in case Nell should take the fever. But now it was almost certain that after such a night the first attack would come on, and so he decided to take precautions against it. This he did with a heavy heart, thinking of what might follow—and if he had not felt the impropriety of a man and leader of a caravan weeping, he would surely have dissolved into tears on parting with his last powder.

In order to hide his emotion he assumed a stern look, turned to the girl, and said:

"Nell, I want you to take the rest of the quinine before you eat."

"And if you get the fever?" she asked.

"Then I will shake myself. Take it, I say."

She took it without further resistance; for since he had shot the Sudanese she was a little afraid of him, notwithstanding the attention and kindness he showed her. Then they all sat down to breakfast; and after the toils of the night thoroughly enjoyed a plate of good soup. Nell fell asleep as soon as the meal was finished and slept some hours. Meanwhile Stasch, Kali, and Mea prepared the caravan for the journey, brought the top part of the tent from the ravine, saddled the horses, put the pack on the donkey, and hid under the roots of shrubs everything they were unable to take with them. They were almost overcome with sleep while performing these duties, so Stasch arranged

280 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

that they should take turns in having a short nap, fearing that otherwise they might go to sleep during the journey.

It was about two o'clock when they set out again. Stasch held Nell in front of him on the saddle and Kali rode with Mea on the second horse. They did not ride straight into the gorge, but kept between its upper side and the forest. The new jungle had grown considerably during this last night of rain, but the ground under the new grass was black and still bore traces of fire. It was easy to surmise that either Smain had passed that way with his men, or that a fire, caused by lightning, had swept over the dried jungle, and, having at last struck the wet forest, had wound itself through the rather narrow course between it and the ravine. Therefore Stasch tried to see whether traces of Smain's encampment or imprints of his horses' hoofs could be found on this route, and to his great joy he was convinced that nothing of the kind was to be seen. Kali, who understood such things, insisted that the fire must have been driven there by the wind more than ten days ago.

"That proves," said Stasch, "that Smain is already heaven knows where with his Mahdists—and that we can not possibly fall into his hands."

He and Nell now began to look at the vegetation with some curiosity, for they had never been in a tropical forest before. They rode

along close to the edge, so as to be in the shade. The ground was damp and soft, and covered with dark green grass, moss, and ferns. Here and there lay old rotten tree-trunks covered with a carpet of beautiful orchids,¹ with cups colored like variegated butterflies in the center of their buds. Wherever the sun shone the earth glittered with other strange tiny orchids,² whose two petals, rising from a third petal, remind one of the head of a small animal with pointed ears. In many places the forest consisted of the shrubs of wild jasmine,³ forming garlands of thin, pink-colored tendrils. The wet paths and crevices were covered with ferns, forming an impenetrable thicket. This underbrush was low in some places, broad in others, and sometimes it grew tall and was encircled by a kind of safflower, which in that case reached to the lowest branches of the tree, giving an effect of fine green lace. In the interior of the woods there were different kinds of trees. Date and bread trees, fan palms, sycamores, large varieties of groundsel, acacias, trees with dark, shining, bright blood-red foliage grew close together, stem to stem, with branches and twigs from which yellow and purple flowers shot forth like torches. In many places the tree-trunks were completely hidden, being covered from head to foot with creepers, which swayed from one branch to the other, forming the capital letters "W" and "M," and resem-

¹*Auselia Africana*.

²*Lissohibeo*.

³*Jasminum trifoliatum*.

282 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

bling festoons, curtains, or portières. India-rubber lianas¹ nearly smothered the trees with their thousands of tendrils, and turned them into pyramids clothed in white flowers. Small lianas wound themselves round the larger ones, and the jungle was in some places so thickly matted that it almost formed a barrier through which neither human being nor animal could penetrate. Only here and there, in places where elephants, whose strength nothing can withstand, had forced a passage, were there gaps in the thicket, which looked like deep, winding corridors. The song of the birds, which make the European forests so charming, was absolutely lacking. On the other hand, there came from the tops of the trees the most peculiar sounds, resembling at times the sharp scraping of a saw, the hollow beating of pots and pans, the chattering of storks, the squeaking of an old rusty door, the clapping of hands, the mewling of cats, and even the loud and animated conversation of human beings. From time to time a swarm of gray, green, or white parrots or a multitude of colored pepper-eaters, with their gliding, wave-like motion, swung themselves in the trees. On the snow-white background of the india-rubber vines there sometimes crept like forest spirits little monkeys in mourning, perfectly black, with the exception of their white tails, white stripes on their sides, and strange-looking

¹*Landolphia florida.*

white whiskers encasing their coal-black faces.

The children gazed with admiration and surprise at the forest, which the eyes of a white man had perhaps never seen before. Saba constantly ran under the bushes and barked cheerfully. Little Nell felt strengthened by the quinine, her breakfast, and her sleep. Her little face was fresh and somewhat rosy, and her eyes had a happier expression. Every minute she asked Stasch the names of the various trees and birds, and he answered her as best he could. At last she said that she would like to get off the horse and pick quantities of flowers.

But the boy smiled and said:

"The 'siafus' would eat you up in a minute."

"What's that—'siafus'? Is that something worse than a lion?"

"Worse and still not worse. They are ants that bite fearfully. The branches are covered with them, and they fall like a shower of fire from the trees and alight on one's back. They crawl along the ground, too. If you should try to get off your horse and go into the woods, you would soon begin to hop about and scream like a little monkey. One might more easily protect one's self from a lion. Sometimes they come in large swarms, and then everything gives way before them."

"But you could surely prevent them doing you any harm!"

284 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"I? Why certainly I could."

"How?"

"With fire or boiling water."

"You always know how to defend yourself," she said, thoroughly convinced.

Stasch felt very much flattered at these words, and so answered in a cheerful voice:

"If you only keep well you can rely on me for the rest."

"I have not even a headache now."

"Thank heaven! Thank heaven!"

During this conversation they were riding on the border of the forest, which was only divided from the narrow pass by a hedge. The sun was still high in the heavens, and its scorching rays beat down on them, for the weather was fine, and there was not a cloud above the horizon. The horses were sweating profusely, and Nell began to complain of the heat. And so Stasch, seeing a suitable place, turned into the gorge, the west side of which was now completely shady. The water still left in the hollows after the storm of the previous day was now fairly cold. Over the heads of the little wanderers there continually flew—from one side of the gorge to the other—pepper-eaters with purple heads, blue breasts, and yellow wings, and the boy began to tell Nell what he had read in books about their habits.

"You know," he said, "there are pepper-eaters which, in the brooding season, find a cavity in a tree, and the female then carries

the eggs there and sets on them, and the male closes the opening with clay so that only the head of the female is visible, and not until the young ones are hatched does he break the wall of clay with his large beak and give the female her liberty again."

"And what does she have to eat all this time?"

"The male feeds her. He flies about constantly and brings her various kinds of berries."

"And is she allowed to sleep?" asked Nell in a sleepy voice.

Stasch smiled.

"If Mrs. Pepper-eater is as sleepy as you are, then the male permits her to go to sleep."

In the coolness of the gorge the girl was suddenly overcome by drowsiness, for her nap that morning had been too short, and she needed more sleep. In fact, Stasch really had a great mind to follow her example, but could not, because he had to hold fast to her for fear she might fall, and besides he was very uncomfortably seated, riding astride on the broad, flat saddle which Hatim and Seki Tamala had made in Fashoda for the little girl. He hardly dared move, and he guided the horse as slowly as possible so as not to wake her up.

And she leaned back, laid her small head on his shoulder, and fell sound asleep. But she breathed so quietly and evenly that Stasch did not regret having given her the last small quinine powder. On hearing her deep breath-

286 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

ing he felt that for the present the danger of fever was over, and he began to make the following observations:

"The bed of the gorge leads continually up hill, and just at this particular spot it is rather steep. We have climbed higher and higher, and the ground is much drier than below. We must now search for a high and well-sheltered place near a rapid stream, and settle down there, give the little one a few weeks in which to recover, and perhaps we shall be obliged to wait until the 'massika'¹ is over. Few girls would have borne up under a tenth part of these trials, and she must take a good rest. After a night such as we have passed through any other girl would have come right down with the fever, but she—how soundly she sleeps! Thank God!"

These thoughts encouraged him, but though he spoke cheerfully to himself while gazing on Nell's head reposing on his shoulder, he was also surprised at his emotions.

"It really is strange how fond I am of this little one. I have always been fond of her, but now I care more and more."

And as he did not know how to account for this he reflected as follows:

"This is probably due to the fact that we have undergone so many dangers together, and also because she happens to be in my care."

While meditating thus he held the child very

¹The spring rainy season.

carefully, with his right hand in her belt, so that she could not fall out of the saddle. They rode on slowly and silently, and Kali whispered in Stasch's ear these flattering words:

"The Great Man kills Gebhr, kills lion, and buffalo. Yah! Yah! The Great Man will kill many lions. Plenty of meat! Plenty of meat! Yah! Yah!"

"Kali," asked Stasch softly, "do the Wa-himas hunt lions, too?"

"Wa-hima afraid of lions, but Wa-hima dig deep trenches, and if a lion falls into them during the night, why then Wa-hima laughs."

"What would you do then?"

"Wa-hima throw many spears until the lion like a porcupine, then drag him out of the trench and eat him. Lion good." And, as was his custom, he stroked his stomach.

This way of killing lions did not appeal strongly to Stasch, so he began to question Kali as to what other kind of game was to be found in the land of the Wa-hima; and so they talked more about antelopes, ostriches, giraffes, and rhinoceroses until they heard the splashing of a waterfall.

"What's that?" cried Stasch. "In front of us is a stream and a waterfall, too!"

Kali nodded his head as a sign that it was really so.

For a time they rode on, quickening their pace and listening intently to the rushing of

288 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the water, which was heard more distinctly every minute.

"A waterfall!" repeated Stasch, who was much interested. But they had scarcely passed through one or two bends in the gorge when they suddenly perceived an insurmountable obstacle lying across their path.

Nell, who had been lulled to sleep by the regular motion of the horse, awoke at once.

"Are we stopping to put up here for the night?" she asked.

"No; but look!" answered Stasch. "See, a rock is lying across the gorge!"

"What can we do?"

"It is impossible to creep alongside of the rock, for it is very narrow just here, and so we must turn back a little way and try to climb to the top and go around it; but as there are still two hours before night-fall we have plenty of time, and this will give the horses a chance to get their wind. Do you hear the waterfall?"

"I hear it."

"That's where we'll halt for the night."

He then turned to Kali and ordered him to climb up the side of the narrow pass to see whether the bottom of the gorge was blocked with more obstacles. As for Stasch, he began to inspect the rock very carefully, and after a while he exclaimed:

"It must have broken off and fallen down here very recently. Do you see where it has broken off, Nell? See how fresh the break is.

There is not even moss or in fact any other kind of plant to be seen on it. I understand now—I understand!”

And with his hand he pointed to a baobab-tree growing on the side of the ravine, its enormous roots hanging down over the side of the cliff where the rock had broken off.

“This root has forced its way through a crevice between the wall and the rock and has grown so long and so thick that it has split the rock off. That seems strange, for stone is harder than wood, but I do know that such things happen in the mountains. A rock like this, which has scarcely any hold, breaks off at the least jar.”

“But what could have jarred it so?”

“That’s difficult to say. Perhaps a previous storm, perhaps yesterday’s rain.”

Saba had remained behind the caravan, but now he came running up, as if some one were pulling him back by the tail, sniffed, squeezed himself through the small passage between the hedge and the fallen rock, and then immediately began to back out, his hair standing on end.

Stasch dismounted to see what had frightened the dog.

“Stasch, don’t go,” begged Nell; “perhaps there is a lion there.”

But the boy, who loved to boast of his wonderful deeds, and who since the events of the

290 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

day before had been greatly enraged against lions, answered:

"That's great! A lion—by day!"

But before he had time to approach the passage Kali's voice was heard from above the gorge.

"Bwana Kubwa! Bwana Kubwa!"

"What's the matter?" cried Stasch.

In a moment the negro slid down the stalk of a creeper. It could easily be seen from his face that he was the bearer of some great news.

"An elephant!" he exclaimed.

"An elephant?"

"Yes," answered the young negro, gesticulating with his hands; "over there rushing water and here cliffs. Elephant can not get out. The Great Man kill elephant and Kali eat him—oh, eat! eat!"

This thought made him so happy that he began to jump around, to smack his lips and slap his knees and to laugh like an idiot, at the same time rolling his eyes and showing his white teeth.

Stasch did not understand at first why Kali said that the elephant could not escape from the gorge, so to make sure of what had happened he mounted his horse, and giving Nell into Mea's care, so that he could have both hands free in case it were necessary to shoot, he ordered Kali to mount behind him; then they all turned back and began to look for a place where they could climb up. On the way, Stasch

asked how the elephant could have got in there, and from Kali's answer he surmised what had really happened.

Apparently the elephant had sought refuge from the flames during the forest fire, and on his way knocked against the rock, which, being insecure, had fallen down and cut off all means of his return. On running further he had come to the end of the narrow pass and found himself on the edge of the abyss, through which the stream flowed, and was thus hemmed in.

After a short time they discovered a way out of the gorge, but as it was rather steep, it was necessary to dismount and lead the horses. As the negro assured them that the stream was not far off, they continued to walk on until they reached the top. At last they came to a high strip of land, which was bordered on the one side by the stream and on the other by the ravine, and then looking down into the depth, they saw the elephant on the flat ground.

The huge animal lay on its stomach, and Stasch was very much astonished that he did not jump up when he caught sight of them, for, as Saba made a dash for the edge of the narrow pass and began to bark, the beast only moved his enormous ears once, and raising his trunk, immediately let it fall again.

The children held each other's hands tight, and looked at him a long while in silence, until Kali said:

"He hunger, die."

292 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

In fact, the elephant had become so thin that the whole length of his backbone stood out like a comb; his sides were hollow, and beneath his hide, notwithstanding its thickness, his ribs could be plainly seen, and it was easy to conjecture that the reason he did not get up was because his strength was exhausted.

The gorge, fairly broad at the entrance, changed into a small pocket, closed in on both sides by perpendicular cliffs, at the bottom of which grew a few trees. These trees had been broken off, their bark was torn off and not a leaf remained. Nearly all the vines that had overhung the cliffs had been eaten and the grass throughout the entire pocket had been uprooted and eaten, even to the very last blade.

After Stasch had taken in the whole situation he began to narrate to Nell what he had seen, but as he thought that the huge animal was doomed to die, he spoke very softly, as if afraid of darkening the last hours of his life.

"Yes, he is really dying of hunger. Probably he has been a prisoner here for the last two weeks, since the time when the forest fire burned up the old jungle. He has eaten up everything that was eatable, and now he is being slowly tormented to death, for he can see bread-fruit trees and acacias growing above him, but is unable to reach them."

And once more they looked down in silence for a while at the elephant, who every now and then turned his small, dying eyes toward

them, and each time a sound like a sob escaped from his throat.

"Really," the boy said, "it would be a mercy to put an end to his suffering."

At these words he raised the rifle to his shoulder, but Nell caught him by the coat, and standing right in front of him, used all her force to drag him away from the edge of the ravine.

"Stasch, don't do it! Give him something to eat! He is so thin! I will not let you shoot him! I will not, I will not!"

And stamping still more emphatically with her foot, she continued to pull him away. He looked at her in surprise, but on seeing tears in her eyes, said:

"But, Nell——"

"I will not allow it. I will not let him be killed! If you kill him, I shall get the fever!"

This threat sufficed to make Stasch abandon his murderous intentions in regard to this elephant and others as well. In fact, he remained silent for a while, as he did not know what to answer the child; then he said:

"Well, all right! All right! I tell you, it is all right! Nell! let me go!"

And Nell at once embraced him and a smile shone out of her tear-stained little eyes. Her only care now was to give the elephant some food as soon as possible. Kali and Mea were very much surprised on hearing that "Bwana Kubwa" was not only not going to shoot the elephant, but that they must straightway pick

294 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the fruit of the bread-tree, the pods of the acacia, and various herbs, leaves and grass, as much as they could collect. Gebhr's double-bladed Sudanese sword greatly aided Kali in accomplishing this task, for without it the work would have been by no means easy. But Nell did not want to wait until they had finished, and as soon as the first fruit fell from the breadfruit tree she grasped it with both hands, carried it to the gorge, and repeated quickly to herself, as if afraid that any one else should get there first:

"I! I! I!"

But Stasch had no thought of depriving her of this pleasure; on the contrary, he took hold of her belt, for fear that in her great excitement she might fall over the edge of the cliff together with her bread-fruit, and cried:

"Throw it down!"

The enormous fruit rolled over the steep precipice and fell at the feet of the elephant, who immediately put out his trunk, picked it up and crunched it as if eager to swallow it at once, and it disappeared instantly.

"He has eaten it up!" cried Nell, overjoyed.

"I should say so!" answered Stasch, laughingly.

The elephant now put out his trunk toward them, as if asking for more, and then could be heard his "Hrrumff!"

"He wants more yet!"

"I should think he did!" replied Stasch.

A second fruit now disappeared like the first, followed by a third, fourth—tenth; then in rapid succession he ate acacia-pods, big bundles of grass, and various kinds of leaves. Nell, would not permit any one to replace her, and when at last her little hands became tired, she still pushed more food down to him with her feet. The elephant continued eating, and it was only now and then, between mouthfuls, that he raised his trunk and gave forth a thundering “Hrrumff,” to denote that he wanted more, and, as Nell felt certain, to show his gratitude.

At last Kali and Mea got tired of this work, which they had performed very faithfully, and they silently hoped that “Bwana Kubwa” would fatten the elephant and kill him later. At last “Bwana Kubwa” told them to stop, for the sun had now sunk quite low and it was time to begin the construction of the hedge. Luckily it was not very difficult, for two sides of the three-cornered strips of land were inaccessible, so that only the third one needed to be fenced in, and plenty of acacias with their terrible thorns grew nearby.

Nell did not move an inch from the gorge, and crouching on its edge, with her legs tightly crossed, she informed Stasch, who was some distance away, what the elephant was doing—and her thin little voice continually rang out:

“He is feeling around with his trunk!” or

296 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"He is moving his ears. He has enormous ears!"

Then at last: "Stasch! Stasch! He is getting up! Oh!"

Stasch approached quickly and took Nell by the hand. In truth, the elephant had really gotten up, and only now could the children see his enormous size. They had occasionally seen large elephants being taken in ships through the Suez Canal on their way from India to Europe, but not one of them could compare with this colossus in size, for he really looked like a large slate-colored, four-footed rock. He differed from those they had seen in having enormous tusks five feet or more long, and, as Nell had already said, fabulously large ears. His front legs were very long, but comparatively thin, which was probably due to his having fasted so many days.

"Oh, what a Liliputian!" cried Stasch; "if he were to take a good stretch and throw out his trunk to its full length he could catch hold of your little foot."

But the giant neither thought of stretching himself nor of catching any one by the foot. With uncertain steps he advanced toward the entrance to the gorge and looked for a while down into the ravine, at the bottom of which the waters whirled; then he turned toward the side nearest the waterfall, sat down on his stomach, put out his trunk into the water, dipped it down deep, and began to drink.

"It was lucky for him," said Stasch, "that he could reach down into the water with his trunk. Otherwise he would have died."

The elephant drank so long that the girl became alarmed.

"Stasch, will he not harm himself?" said she.

"I don't know," he answered smilingly; "but as you have taken him under your special care you should warn him now."

And so Nell bent over the side and called:

"Enough, dear elephant, enough!"

And the "dear elephant," as if he understood what was meant, immediately stopped drinking, and at once began to spray himself with the water, first his legs, then his back, and lastly his two sides.

In the meanwhile it began to get dark, and so Stasch guided the little girl back to the hedge, where supper was already awaiting them.

Both children were in the best of humor—Nell, because she had saved the elephant's life, and Stasch, because he saw her small eyes gleaming like stars and her happy little face looking fresher and healthier than it had since their departure from Khartum. What also added to the satisfaction of the boy was that he had promised himself a quiet and good night's rest. The strip of land, inaccessible on two sides, ensured them from attack from those directions, and on the third side Kali and Mea had erected such a high hedge out of

298 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

prickly acacias and branches of *passiflora*¹ that there was no possibility of any beast of prey being able to break through the barrier. Besides the weather was fine, and soon after sunset the sky was studded with stars. It was very pleasant to be cooled off by being in the proximity of the waterfall, and to breathe the heavy fragrance of the jungle and the freshly broken off branches.

"The 'fly' will not get the fever here!" thought Stasch joyfully.

They began to talk about the elephant, for Nell could speak of nothing else, and she continually expressed her admiration for his huge size, his trunk, and his tusks, which really were enormous. At last she said:

"How wise he is, Stasch, isn't he?"

"As wise as Solomon," replied Stasch. "But how did you find that out?"

"Because, when I asked him to stop drinking, he immediately complied with my request."

"If he had never taken lessons in the English language before, and understands what you said to him, then indeed it is quite remarkable."

Nell perceived that Stasch was making fun of her, so she fondled him like a little kitten, and said:

"Say what you like, but I'm certain that he is very wise, and that he can be readily tamed at once."

¹*Odenia globosa.*

"Whether readily and at once I'm not sure, but he can be tamed. The African elephant is wilder than the Asiatic, but I believe that Hannibal, for instance, used African beasts."

"Who was Hannibal?"

Stasch looked indulgently and pityingly at her.

"Of course," he said, "at your age you are not expected to know—Hannibal was a great leader of the Carthaginian army, which used elephants in the war with the Romans, and as Carthage was in Africa, he was obliged to use African elephants."

The conversation was interrupted by a tremendous trumpeting of the elephant, which, after having satisfied his hunger and thirst, began—either from joy or longing to be free—to signal with his trunk. Saba sat up and began to bark, and Stasch said:

"See what you have done? Now he is calling his friends. A nice story if a whole herd were to approach."

"He will tell the others that we were good to him," answered Nell hastily.

But Stasch, who really was not at all worried (because he reckoned that, even if several were to come along, the light of the fire would frighten them away), laughed defiantly and said:

"Well, well! But if elephants should appear, you will not cry for fear; oh, no!—your eyes

800 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

would only perspire as they have done twice before!"

And he began to imitate her:

"I'm not crying, only my eyes perspire so!"

When Nell saw that he was joking she concluded that they were in no danger.

"If we tame him," she said, "then my eyes will not perspire any more, even if ten lions should roar."

"Why?"

"Because he will protect us."

Stasch quieted Saba, who had continued to bark in answer to the elephant's trumpeting, then thought a while and continued:

"But, Nell, there is one thing that you did not think of. We shall not stay here forever; we must ride on further. I do not say immediately—on the contrary. This place is very convenient and healthy, so I have decided to remain here one week—perhaps two—for you and I and in fact all of us need a good rest. Well, all right! As long as we stay here we will feed the elephant, although this is an enormous task for us all. He is imprisoned, and we can not take him with us. But how will this end? We shall go away and he will stay here and starve once more, until he succumbs. And of course we will grieve even more than we would now."

Nell felt very sad, and for a time sat there silently, apparently not knowing what answer to make to these very sensible remarks, but

soon she raised her head, and pushing aside the lock of hair which always fell over her forehead into her eyes, she turned her eyes confidently toward the boy.

"I know," she said, "that you could get him out of the gorge if you only wanted to."

"Yes?"

But she put out a finger, touched Stasch's hand, and repeated:

"Yes! Yes! Yes!"

The small and clever little lady knew quite well that the boy would be flattered by her confidence in him and that from now on he would earnestly consider how to release the elephant.

CHAPTER V

THE night passed quietly, for although there was a bank of clouds toward the south, the morning was clear.

Following Stasch's orders, Kali and Mea busied themselves after breakfast gathering the fruit of the breadfruit tree, acacia pods, fresh leaves, grass and roots of all kinds of eatables for the elephant, and laid them down on the edge of the gorge. As Nell wanted very much to feed her new friend herself, Stasch cut from a young, wide-branched melon-tree a kind of pitchfork, so that she could more easily throw the provisions into the bottom of the ravine. The elephant had been trumpeting since early

302 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

morning, for he was evidently hungry, and when he saw on the edge of the cliff the same little white creature who fed him the day before, he greeted her by making a joyful sound and immediately stretched out his trunk toward her. In the morning sunshine the children thought he looked even taller than the day before. Although he was very thin, he seemed somewhat stronger now, and his tiny eyes looked almost merrily at Nell. She even insisted that his forelegs had grown stouter over night, and she made such haste to throw the food down to him that Stasch was obliged to restrain her, for she finally became greatly overheated and he had to take her place. Both children were having a very good time, and they were especially amused at the queer faces the elephant made. At first the animal ate everything indiscriminately that fell at his feet, but when his hunger was somewhat appeased he was more discriminating. When plants were given to him that he did not like, he pushed them away with his forefeet and tossed them in the air with his trunk, as though trying to say: "These delicacies I reserve for you up there to eat." Finally, after the beast had satisfied his hunger and quenched his thirst, he began to slap his huge ears with great satisfaction.

"I am sure," said Nell, "that he would not hurt us now if we went down to him," and in order to make sure she called down to the elephant:

"Elephant, dear elephant, you would not hurt us, would you?"

And as the elephant moved his trunk as if in answer, she turned triumphantly to Stasch: "Look! He says 'Yes!'"

"Perhaps so," replied Stasch; "elephants are very intelligent animals, and this one has evidently come to the conclusion that we are necessary for his welfare. Who can say whether he may not be a little grateful to us? It is better not to attempt it now, and certainly Saba would not dare do it, for he would be killed at once. Perhaps in time they may become friends."

All further conversation about the beauty of the elephant was cut short by Kali, who, foreseeing that he would have to work hard every day to obtain food for the beast, approached Stasch, smiled cheerfully, and said:

"Great Man kill elephant and Kali eat him, instead of gathering grass and branches for him."

But the "Great Man's" thoughts were miles away from killing the elephant, and as he had a very happy disposition, he replied while standing there:

"You're a donkey."

Unfortunately he had forgotten the word for "donkey" in the Ki-swahili language—so he used the English word "donkey" and Kali, who did not understand any English, concluded that this name was applied to him as a

304 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

compliment or a reward, for the children soon saw him turn toward Mea and heard him bragging as follows:

"Mea has black skin and black head and Kali is a donkey."

Then he continued, with pride:

"The Great Man himself said that Kali was a donkey."

Stasch, after ordering them both to guard the young lady like the apple of their eye, and to call him at once should anything happen, grasped his rifle and started off toward the fallen rock that blocked up the gorge. When he reached the spot he examined everything very carefully, inspected all the cracks, put a twig into a crevice which he discovered in the lower part of the rock and measured its depth exactly, then he slowly returned to the camping place, opened his cartridge-case and began to count the cartridges.

Scarcely had he counted three hundred when from out of a tall baobab-tree near by, about five hundred feet from the tent, he heard Mea's voice crying:

"Sir! Sir!"

Stasch approached the big tree, the hollowed-out trunk of which resembled a tomb, and asked:

"What do you want?"

"There are many zebras to be seen not far from here, and further off antelopes also."

"Good. I will take my gun and go after

them, for we must have some meat to smoke. But why did you climb up in the tree and what are you doing up there?"

The girl answered in a sad, drawling voice:

"Mea saw a nest of gray parrots and wanted to bring the young ones to the little lady, but the nest is empty, and so Mea will not get any glass beads for her neck."

"You will get some because you love the little lady."

The young negress slid down hastily over the rugged tree bark, and with eyes beaming with joy she called repeatedly:

"Oh, yes, yes! Mea loves the little lady very much, and she also loves glass beads!"

Stasch stroked her head kindly, then he took the rifle, closed the cartridge-case, and went in the direction where the zebras were grazing. After half an hour had elapsed the crack of a shot sounded in the camping-place, and at the end of an hour the young hunter returned with the good news that not only zebras, but numerous herds of antelope and small groups of water-bucks were feeding near the river.

Then he ordered Kali to take a horse with him and get the animal which had been killed, while he himself carefully examined the huge trunk of the baobab-tree and began to test the rugged bark with the end of his rifle.

"What are you doing?" asked Nell.

He answered:

"Look, what a giant! Fifteen people holding one another's hands could not encircle this tree, which perhaps dates back to the time of Pharaoh. But the lower part of the trunk is rotten and hollow. You see this opening is large enough for any one to pass through. One could make a sort of large room in there, where we all could live together. That occurred to me when I saw Mea up in the branches, and while I was silently approaching the zebras the plan continually recurred to me."

"But we must hurry on to Abyssinia."

"Yes. But we must rest also, and as I told you yesterday, I have decided to stay here a week or two. You would not want to leave your elephant, and on your account I am afraid of the rainy season, which has already begun, when you will surely get the fever. The weather is fine to-day, but you see that the clouds are gathering, and who knows if the rain will not come before evening. The tent is not sufficient shelter for you, and within this giant tree, provided it be not hollow to the very top, we shall be able to laugh at the worst down-pour. It would be much safer for us within it than in the tent, for if we were to stuff this opening and the windows, which we would have to make for light, with thorns every evening, any number of lions could roar around the tree. The rainy season only lasts a month during the spring, and I am still of the opinion that we should wait until it is over. If we have to wait

we had better wait here in this giant tree than under a tent or anywhere else."

As Nell always acquiesced in Stasch's plans, she assented now, especially as she was delighted with the plan of remaining near the elephant and living in the tree. She began at once to think how she could arrange the rooms, how furnish them, and how they would then invite each other to "five o'clocks" and dinners. Finally they both became merry, and Nell immediately wanted to take a look at the new house, but Stasch, who had learned day by day from experience to be cautious, prevented her from proceeding in too great haste.

"Before we take possession of the house," said he, "we must beg the present inhabitants, if there are any there, kindly to depart."

After this he ordered Mea to throw several lighted branches, which being green smoked profusely, into the interior of the tree. It was well he did so, for the giant tree was indeed inhabited, and by tenants whose hospitality could not be depended upon.

CHAPTER VI

THE tree had two openings, a large one half a yard from the ground, and a smaller one, somewhere about the height of the first story of a town house. Hardly had Mea thrown the burning branches into the lower one than large bats began to fly out of the top one, and,

308 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

blinded by the sun, they circled around the tree, screaming as loud as they could. But the real master of the house soon wriggled out of the lower opening, and it proved to be an enormous boa-constrictor, which, though apparently still half asleep, had devoured the remnants of its last feast, and not until the smoke reached its nostrils had it awakened and sought safety. At the sight of this iron-colored body squirming out of the smoking tree-hollow, uncoiling itself like an enormous spring, Stasch picked Nell up in his arms and started to run away with her in the direction of the open wilderness. The reptile, itself frightened by the smoke and fire, did not follow them, but wended its way through the grass and the piles of baggage and disappeared very swiftly in the direction of the gorge, to hide itself in the crevices of the rocks. The children regained their courage. Stasch set Nell on the ground, hurried to fetch his rifle, and then ran in the direction of the gorge after the snake. Nell followed close behind. After going a short distance they beheld such an extraordinary sight that they both stood rooted to the ground. High above the gorge the body of the snake appeared for an instant, wriggled in the air, then fell to the ground. After a while it appeared a second time, then fell down again. When the children reached the edge of the ravine they saw to their surprise that their new friend, the elephant, was playing with the snake, and after

having thrown it in the air twice, he was now stamping on its head with his feet, which resembled blocks of wood. Having finished this performance, he lifted the still squirming body with his trunk; this time he did not throw it into the air, but right into the waterfall. Then he swayed from side to side, fanned himself with his ears, and began to fix his eyes on Nell, and at last put out his trunk toward her, as if demanding a reward for his heroic and sensible deed.

Nell immediately ran toward the tent and returned with a quantity of wild figs, a few of which she threw to him. He picked them up carefully and swallowed one after another. Those that fell into deep crevices he picked up by blowing into the cracks with such force that stones the size of one's fist flew into the air along with the figs. The children showed their appreciation of these tricks by laughing and clapping their hands. Nell repeatedly brought more food, and every time she threw a fig down she maintained that he was quite tame now, and that it would be safe for her to go down to him.

"Do you see, Stasch, now we shall have a protector—for he is afraid of nothing in the wilderness, not even of a lion or a snake, or a crocodile. Besides, he is very good—and surely he ought to be fond of us."

"If he should become tame," said Stasch, "so that I might leave you in his care, I would

810 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

not be afraid to go off hunting, for I could not find a better protector for you in the whole of Africa."

After a while he continued:

"It is a fact that the elephants of Africa are wilder, but I have read that the Asiatic ones, for instance, have a peculiar weakness for children. In India there has never been a case of an elephant hurting a child, and when one of these animals becomes enraged, as sometimes happens, children are sent to appease it."

"So you see, you see!"

"At any rate, you were right in preventing me from killing him."

Thereupon Nell's eyes shone with joy. Standing on tiptoe, she laid both hands on Stasch's shoulders, and leaning her head back and looking into his eyes, she asked:

"I behaved as if I were—how old? Tell me! As if I were—how old?"

And he answered:

"At least seventy."

"You do nothing but joke."

"Well, be angry! be angry! But who will release the elephant?"

On hearing this Nell clung to him like a young kitten.

"You!—and I shall love you very much for it, and so will he."

"I have already thought about it," said Stasch; "but it will be a very troublesome thing

to do. I shall not do it now, but only when we are ready to continue our journey."

"Why?"

"For this reason: because if I should release him before he is quite tame and before he has got used to us, he would immediately run away."

"Oh! he will not leave me."

"Do you think he is as fond of you as I am?" replied Stasch somewhat impatiently.

All further conversation was interrupted by the approach of Kali, who brought the slain zebra with its young one, which had been bitten to death by Saba. It was a lucky thing for the bulldog that he had followed Kali, and had therefore not been present at the routing out of the snake, for the dog would have followed it, and had he come within its reach would have been squeezed to death in its coils long before Stasch could have come to the rescue. He received a box on the ears from Stasch for having torn to pieces the young zebra, but he did not seem to take this very much to heart, for he did not even put in his tongue, which had been hanging out ever since he came from the chase.

Meanwhile Stasch gave Kali to understand that he intended to arrange a dwelling-place in the tree, and told him what had happened when smoking out the tree-trunk, and what the elephant had done to the snake. The thought of living in the giant tree, which not

312 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

only served as a protection against the rain, but also against wild animals, pleased the negro very much, but, on the other hand, the elephant's behavior did not at all meet with his approval.

"The elephant is stupid," said he, "and therefore he threw the 'nioka' (snake) into the rushing waters, but Kali knows that 'nioka' is very good to eat, and so he will fish it out of the water and roast it, for Kali is clever—and a donkey."

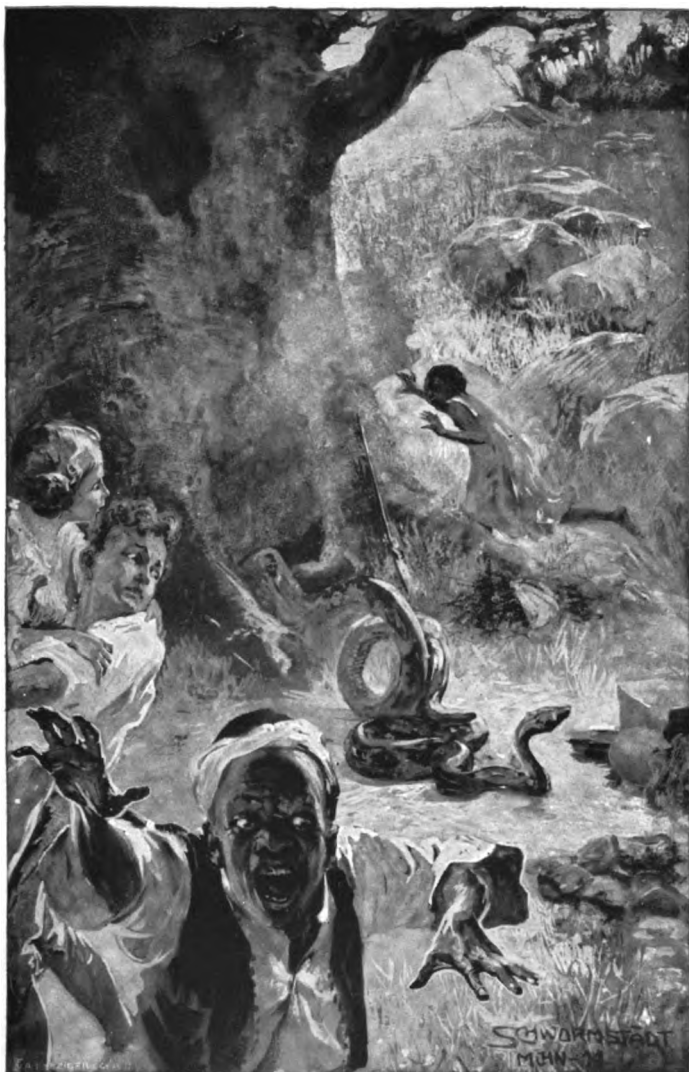
"Yes, you are a donkey, all right," answered Stasch. "You surely do not want to eat a snake."

"Nioka is good," said Kali.

And pointing to the dead zebra, he added:

"Better than this nyama."

Then they both walked toward the baobab-tree and began to arrange the house. Kali took a flat stone, the shape of a large sieve, from the bank of the river, laid it down inside the tree-trunk, and put more and more burning wood on it, taking care that the rotten wood in the inside of the tree did not catch fire, which would have set the entire tree ablaze. He said that he did this so that nothing could bite the "Great Man" and the little "Bibi." It was soon apparent that this was no unnecessary precaution, for no sooner had the wreaths of smoke filled the interior of the tree and rushed out than all kinds of vermin began to creep out of the broken bark—black and



“At the sight of the boa-constrictor squirming out of the smoking tree-hollow, uncoiling itself like an enormous spring, Stasch picked up Nell in his arms and started to run away.”—PAGE 308.

cherry-colored beetles, plum-sized hairy spiders, caterpillars covered with finger-long prickly hairs, and all sorts of horrible poisonous vermin, whose bite might even cause death. From what was taking place on the exterior of the trunk, it could readily be imagined that many similar insects were meeting their fate in the clouds of smoke within, and the insects which fell to the grass from the bark and the lower branches were unmercifully killed with stones by Kali, who all the time stared fixedly at the two openings in the hollow trunk as if afraid that some strange creature would appear at any minute.

"Why do you look like that?" asked Stasch; "do you believe that there is another snake hidden in the tree?"

"No; Kali is afraid of 'Msimu.'"

"What's that, 'Msimu'?"

"Evil spirit."

"Have you ever seen a Msimu?"

"No, but Kali has heard the dreadful noise made by Msimu in the sorcerers' huts."

"So your sorcerers are not afraid of him?"

"The sorcerers fully believe in him; they enter our huts and tell us that Msimu is angry, and the negroes bring them bananas, honey, pombe (a beer made from a certain plant), eggs and meat, with which to propitiate Msimu."

Stasch raised his eyebrows.

"I should think it would be delightful to be

one of your sorcerers. But could this snake have been Msimu?"

Kali shook his head.

"If this had been so the elephant would not have killed Msimu, but Msimu would have killed the elephant. Msimu is dead."

A weird crackling sound suddenly interrupted him. From the lower cavity in the tree came a strange-looking cloud of red dust; after which the crackling became louder.

Kali at once prostrated himself on his face and began to scream in terror:

"Aka! Msimu! Aka! Aka! Aka!"

At first Stasch drew back, too, but he soon regained his composure, and when Nell and Mea came running up he explained the probable cause to them.

"It is most likely," he said, "that layers of mold, loosened by the heat, have fallen down and smothered the fire. But Kali believes it was Msimu. Mea shall pour water into the cavity, for if the fire is not smothered and the mold should ignite, it might burst out and the whole tree be consumed."

Stasch saw that Kali still lay prostrate in terror, repeating "Aka! Aka!" so he picked up his rifle, shot into the cavity, then touched the boy with the butt of the gun and said:

"Your Msimu is shot. Don't be frightened."

Kali raised himself a little, but remained on his knees.

"O great, great sir! Is the master not even afraid of Msimu?"

Stasch's reply was a laugh.

After a while the negro became calm, and sat down to the meal prepared by Mea. It was very evident that his momentary fright had not affected his appetite, for in addition to a substantial helping of smoked meat he ate the raw liver of the young zebra, not to mention the wild figs, quantities of which grew on a neighboring sycamore. Then he and Stasch returned to the tree, where there was still plenty of work to be done, for it took more than two hours to take out the mold and ashes, the burned bats, the piles of roasted beetles, and other large insects.

Stasch wondered how the bats could have lived in such close proximity to the snake, but he concluded that the monster either disdained such small prey or could not reach it, being unable to uncoil itself inside the tree. The heat had caused the layers of mold to break off, and thus cleaned out the interior very thoroughly. Stasch was delighted to see this, for the cavity was as spacious as a large room, and would be big enough not only to shelter four persons, but ten. The lower opening formed a door; the upper, a window; and consequently it was neither dark nor stuffy in the giant tree. Stasch decided to divide the interior into two rooms by means of the tent canvas; one of these he intended for Nell and

316 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Mea and the other for himself, Kali, and Saba. The tree was not decayed at the top, therefore no rain could penetrate it, and in order to make it completely waterproof it was only necessary to raise and prop the bark slightly over both openings, so as to form two gutters. They decided to strew the floor inside with sun-dried sand from the bank of the stream, and to cover this with a padding of dry moss.

This was very hard work, especially for Kali, for he had also to smoke the meat, water the horses, and supply food for them all, as well as for the elephant, who continually reminded them of it by trumpeting. But the young negro set to work with great zest and industry arranging their new abode. The reason for his industry was discovered by Stasch that very day.

"If the Great Man and Bibi," said he, with his hands on his hips, "are to live in the tree, Kali will not have to build a large hedge for the night, and so he will have nothing to do in the evening."

"So you like being idle, eh?" said Stasch.

"Kali is a man, and so he likes to be idle, for only women should work."

"And yet you see that I work for Bibi."

"But, on the other hand, Bibi will have to work for the Great Man when she grows up—and should she refuse, the Great Man will surely beat her."

THROUGH THE DESERT 817

At the very thought of this Stasch sprang up and cried angrily:

"You fool, do you know what 'Bibi' is?"

"I don't know," answered the frightened boy.

"Bibi is—is—a good Msimu."

At this Kali fairly staggered.

On finishing his work he walked shyly up to Nell, prostrated himself on his face before her, and began in a beseeching, if not a frightened voice, to repeat:

"Aka! Aka! Aka!"

And the "good Msimu" looked at him wonderingly with her lovely sea-green eyes, for she could not understand what had happened, and what was the matter with Kali.

CHAPTER VII

THE new dwelling-place, which Stasch had named "Cracow," was all ready for them in three days. Most of the baggage had been placed in "the men's room," and even before the house was ready the four youngsters were well sheltered there during a severe storm. The rainy season had now set in in earnest. This rain is not like our long autumnal storms, when the sky is covered over with lowering clouds and the monotonous, dreary weather lasts for weeks. Here the dense clouds which water the earth so plentifully are dissipated by the wind several times a day. Then the sun

318 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

shines again as though just emerging from a bath and floods the cliffs, the stream, the trees, and the entire jungle with its golden light. One can almost see the grass grow. The foliage on the trees is luxuriant, and before one fruit drops off another is forming. The excessive moisture in the air makes it so transparent that even far-off objects stand out distinctly and one can see to a great distance. On the horizon there are beautiful rainbows, the colors of which are always reflected in the waterfall.

During the short dawn and the twilight the sky shone and reflected a thousand bright colors more wonderful than the children had ever seen even in the Libyan desert. The clouds hanging down nearest the water were cherry-colored, and the higher regions, better lighted, looked like seas of purple and gold, and the small, puffy clouds shone alternately like rubies, amethysts, and opals. At night, in the intervals between showers, the moon converted the dewdrops hanging on the leaves of the acacias and mimosas into diamonds, and the tropical light shone much more brilliantly through the fresh, transparent air than at other seasons of the year.

Under the waterfall, in the swamps formed by the stream, the croaking of frogs and the melancholy concert of toads rang out, and the fireflies, like shooting stars, flitted through the bamboo bushes from one bank to the other.

When the clouds again hid the starry sky and it began to rain, the night became pitch dark, and inside the tree it was as dark as a cellar. To remedy this Stasch got Mea to melt some fat taken from the slain animals, and out of a tin can he made a lamp, which he hung under the upper opening that the children called a window. The light from this window could be seen afar off through the darkness, and while it frightened away the wild animals, it attracted bats and night birds, so that finally Kali had to put up a kind of a curtain of thorns, like the one with which he closed the lower opening for the night. In the daytime, between showers, if the weather were fine, the children would leave "Cracow" and wander over the entire strip of land. Stasch would hunt gazels, antelopes, and ostriches, herds of which often appeared on the banks of the lower stream, and Nell would visit her elephant, which at first only trumpeted when he wanted some food, but later began trumpeting when he felt lonesome for his little friend. He always greeted her with signs of joy, and at once began to prick up his large ears whenever he heard her voice or step even far away.

One day when Stasch was out hunting and Kali was fishing above the waterfall, Nell decided to go to the rock which blocked the gorge to see if Stasch had done anything to remove it. Mea, who was busy preparing the mid-day meal, did not notice her departure. On her

320 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

way Nell picked a peculiar kind of begonia,¹ which grew in large quantities between the crevices of the rock; she approached the slope over which they had formerly ridden out of the gorge, and walked till she came to the rock. The large boulder had broken off the side of the cliff, and barred the mouth of the ravine as before, but Nell noticed that there was still enough room between it and the wall of the cliff for even a grown person to get through easily. She hesitated a while and then passed through, gaining the opposite side. But there was still another bend, which had to be passed before reaching the broad mouth of the gorge, enclosed by the waterfall. Nell began to consider what she should do. "I will go only a little farther; then I will look from behind a rock and take a peep at the elephant; he will not spy me, and then I shall turn back." So she crept forward until she reached the place where the gorge suddenly widened into a small, deep valley, and then she saw the elephant. He stood with his back toward her, his trunk in the water, taking a drink. This encouraged her, and keeping close to the wall of the cliff, she walked a few steps, bending forward a little more; just then the giant beast, who was going to take a bath, turned his head, saw the little girl and immediately started toward her.

Nell was thoroughly frightened, but having no time to retreat, she made her very prettiest

¹Begonia Johnstoni.

courtesy, and then extending her hand in which she held the begonias, said in a rather trembling voice:

“Good morning, dear elephant! I know you will not hurt me, and so I have come here to say good-day to you—I have only these little flowers——”

The colossus approached, put out his trunk and took from Nell’s fingers the blossoms, but no sooner had he put them in his mouth than he let them drop, for evidently he did not like the taste of the stringy leaves or the flowers. Nell now saw directly above her his trunk, which resembled an enormous black snake; it stretched and contracted, touched her little hands one at a time, then her arms, and at last it hung down and began to swing from side to side.

“I knew you would not hurt me,” repeated the girl, although still somewhat frightened.

The elephant flapped his huge ears, alternately extended and contracted his trunk, and gave the grunt of satisfaction that he always did when the girl approached the edge of the ravine.

Just as Stasch had once faced the lion, so now these two (Nell and the elephant) stood face to face—he, a monster resembling a house or a rock, and she a tiny crab that he, even if not angry, but merely careless, might trample under foot.

But the careful beast did not move an inch,

322 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

and seemed delighted at beholding his little visitor.

Nell gradually took courage; at last, raising her eyes and looking up as if to a high roof, she timidly extended her hand and asked:

“May I stroke your trunk?”

The elephant did not understand English, but he immediately knew what she meant from the motion of her hand, and pushed the end of his two-yard-long nose into the palm of her hand. Nell began to stroke the trunk, at first only with one hand and very carefully, then with both, and at last she threw both arms around it and clung to it with childish confidence.

The elephant moved from one foot to the other, and grunted with satisfaction.

Soon after, winding his trunk around the fragile body of the girl, he lifted her high and began gently to swing her from side to side.

“More! More!” cried Nell, delighted.

This game lasted quite a while; the girl, who now had entire confidence in the elephant and was no longer afraid, thought of another plan, for on reaching the ground again she tried to climb up the foreleg of the elephant, as though climbing up a tree, or hid behind him, and asked him if he could find her. During these pranks she noticed that in the elephant's feet, especially in its hind feet, there were a great many thorns, which the powerful animal was

not able to extract, because, in the first place, he could not reach his hind legs readily with his trunk, and secondly, because he evidently was afraid of wounding the finger which forms the end of the trunk, and without which he would lose all his dexterity. Nell did not know that thorns in the feet torment Indian elephants, and especially their cousins in the African jungles, which mostly consist of prickly plants. Her sympathies were aroused for the kindly giant, and squatting down near one of his feet, she began to pull out the large thorns and then the small ones, chattering incessantly and assuring the elephant that she would not let a single one remain. He understood very well what was the matter, and bending his knee, he plainly showed that there were thorns in the soles of his feet between the hoofs protecting the toes, and these thorns were even more painful than the others.

Meanwhile Stasch had returned from hunting, and at once asked Mea where the little lady was.

On receiving the answer that she was probably in the tree, he was just going to look inside when he thought he heard her voice in the gorge. To make sure, he immediately sprang to the edge and looked down. He was so frightened at what he saw that the blood nearly froze in his veins. The girl was seated at the feet of the colossus, and the latter stood so

824 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

quiet that but for the movements of his trunk and ears one might have thought him hewn out of stone.

"Nell!" screamed Stasch.

Earnestly engaged in what she was doing, she answered him cheerfully:

"In a minute! In a minute!"

The boy, who was not accustomed to postpone action when in danger, picked up his rifle with one hand, while with the other he grasped a dried liana stem, twisted both legs around it, and in a second swung himself down to the level of the narrow pass.

The elephant flapped his ears uneasily, but at this instant Nell arose, put her arms around his trunk and cried hastily, "Elephant, don't be frightened; that's Stasch!"

Stasch at once saw that Nell was in no danger, but even then his legs shook under him and his heart beat violently. But before he recovered from his fright he mumbled in an angry but sad voice:

"Nell, Nell, how could you do that?"

She began to excuse herself, saying she had done nothing wrong after all, for the elephant was kind and quite tame now, and she had only intended to take a closer look at him and then go back, but he had detained her by playing with her and carefully swinging her, and that if Stasch liked he would swing him, too. As she spoke these words she lifted the end of his trunk with one hand, and drawing it toward

Stasch, she waved the other hand from side to side, saying:

"Elephant, rock Stasch, too!"

The intelligent animal guessed from her movements what she wanted, and in a second Stasch was grasped by the belt and swung through the air. Seeing him looking so angry and at the same time swinging through the air struck her as so comical, that she laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks, and clapping her hands, she repeated as before:

"Elephant, swing Stasch, too!"

It was utterly impossible to maintain a severe demeanor and preach morality while hanging to the end of an elephant's trunk and being involuntarily swung to and fro with clock-like regularity, so the boy at last laughed too. After a while, noticing that the trunk was moving more slowly, and that the elephant intended to put him down, a new idea seized him, and when near one of the elephant's large ears he held on to it, and swinging himself onto the beast's head, seated himself on his neck.

"Aha!" he cried, as he glanced down at Nell, "he shall know that he has to obey me."

And with the look of a lord and master he began to feel around the head of the beast.

"Good!" cried Nell from below, "but how will you get down?"

"That's very easy," answered Stasch.

Dropping his legs down over the elephant's

head, he fastened them around the trunk and slid down as from a tree.

"That's the way I shall get down."

Now they both began to pull the remaining thorns out of the elephant's foot, and he submitted very patiently to the operation.

Meanwhile the first drops of rain had begun to fall, so Stasch decided to take Nell back to "Cracow" at once. But an unexpected obstacle stood in their way, for the elephant would on no account part with her, but turned her round with his trunk and drew her toward him. The situation began to be serious, and on account of the obstinacy of the animal their happy play was in danger of ending badly. The boy did not know what to do, for it was now raining harder and a bad storm threatened. Both retreated a short distance toward the opening, but they had only taken a few steps when the elephant followed them.

At last Stasch planted himself between Nell and the animal, looked severely at him, and whispered to Nell:

"Don't run away, but retire slowly and with measured step toward the narrow passage."

"And you, Stasch?" asked the little girl.

"Return!" he repeated energetically; "for otherwise I shall have to shoot the elephant."

At this threat she obeyed, especially as she now completely trusted the elephant, and she felt sure that on no account would he hurt Stasch.

The boy stood four feet away from the giant, his eyes riveted on him. Several minutes elapsed, then the situation became decidedly dangerous. The elephant's ears moved backwards and forwards several times, and he had a peculiar twinkle in his little eyes; he raised his trunk suddenly.

Stasch turned pale.

"Death!" he thought.

But the colossus as suddenly turned to the wall of the narrow pass, where he was accustomed to see Nell, and began to trumpet more sadly than ever before.

Stasch now advanced toward the passage, and on the opposite side of the rock he found Nell, who would not return to the tree alone.

The boy felt inclined to say to her: "See what you have done! A little more and I should have perished, and you would have been to blame." But this was not the time to reproach her, for the rain had become a storm, and it was necessary to get home as quickly as possible. Nell was quite wet, notwithstanding that Stasch had wrapped her in his own coat.

When inside the tree Stasch ordered the negress to change Nell's clothes immediately. He released Saba, who had been tied up in the men's room for fear he would scent the game and frighten it away; then Stasch began to hunt through all the clothing and baggage once more, in hopes of finding a small dose of

328 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

quinine which might have been overlooked. But he found nothing. There only remained a little white powder in a corner of the bottom of the vessel which the missionary in Khartum had given him, but so little that it was hardly enough to whiten the tip of one's finger. He therefore decided to pour boiling water into the receptacle and give this water to Nell to drink.

As soon as the storm subsided and the sun had come out again, he left the tree to look at the fish caught by Kali. The negro had caught about ten with a wire, which he had used for a line. Most of them were small, but there were three a foot long, with silver spots, and of very light weight. Mea, who had grown up on the banks of the blue Nile, and knew about the fish, said that these were very good to eat, and that at night they jump high out of the water. While cleaning them it was found that they were so light because they had large air bladders inside them. Stasch took one of these little skins, which was the size of a large apple, and showed it to Nell.

"Look," said he, "this was inside the fish. A pane for our window could be made from a quantity of these bladders." And he pointed to the upper opening in the tree.

Then he thought for a minute and added:

"And something else."

"What?" asked Nell, very curious.

"Kites."

"Like those you used to fly in Port Said? Oh, good! Make some like them!"

"I will; I will make the small frames out of thin strips of bamboo, and use these bladders instead of paper. They will be lighter and better than paper and the rain will not penetrate them. Such a kite will fly very high, and in a strong wind it will fly—Heaven knows where."

Then he suddenly tapped his forehead.

"I have an idea!"

"What is it?"

"You will see. As soon as my plan is formed you shall know all about it. And now the elephant is trumpeting so loud we can't hear ourselves talk."

In fact, the elephant trumpeted so loudly and continuously because he was lonesome for Nell, and perhaps for both children, that it shook the whole gorge and the neighboring trees.

"If we let him see us," said Nell, "it may quiet him." So they walked toward the gorge. But Stasch, quite taken up with his new idea, began to mutter to himself:

"Nell Rawlison and Stanislaus Tarkowski, from Port Said, who have escaped from the hands of the Dervishes, are to be found——"

And taking breath, he asked himself:

"Yes, yes, but where shall I say—where?"

"What, Stasch?"

"Nothing, nothing! I have it now: 'They

880 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

can be found a month's journey away to the east of the blue Nile—and beg for immediate assistance.' When there is a north or west wind I will send up twenty, fifty, one hundred of such kites, and you, Nell, will help me to stick them together."

"Kites?"

"Yes, and I tell you this much—they may be of more service to us than even ten elephants."

Meanwhile they had reached the edge of the precipice, and once more the colossus began to move from one foot to the other, to shake himself, to prick up his ears, and as soon as Nell went away for a minute he began trumpeting again. At last the girl explained to the "dear elephant" that they could not always stay with him, for they had to sleep, eat, work, and attend to household duties in "Cracow." He was only pacified when she threw down to him the food Kali had prepared for him, but in the evening the trumpeting began again. That night the children named him the "King," for Nell insisted that before he entered the gorge he must have been the king over all the elephants of Africa.

CHAPTER VIII

DURING the days that followed, when it did not rain, Nell spent most of her time with King, who now made no objection to her going away, because he found that she returned

frequently during the day. Kali, who was afraid of elephants, was very much surprised at this, but at last they convinced him that the great and good "Msimu" had bewitched the giant, and he too began to visit it. King was kindly disposed to him and also to Mea; but Nell was the only one who could do what she liked with him, and a week later she ventured to take Saba along with her. Stasch felt very much relieved, for without worry he now could leave Nell in the care of—or, as he expressed himself, "under the trunk" of—the elephant, go hunting, and sometimes even take Kali along without feeling any anxiety. He felt certain that the animal would not now leave them under any circumstances, and he began to ponder as to how he could release King from his imprisonment.

He had long ago fully decided on his plan of action; but the sacrifice it demanded was so great that he considered a long while before attempting it, and even then put it off from day to day. As he had no one else with whom to talk the matter over, he finally decided to confide his plans to Nell, although he still looked upon her as a child.

"The rock could be blasted," said he, "but that would mean the destruction of a great many cartridges, for the bullets would have to be removed, and the powder poured out until enough was obtained. This I would put into the deep crevice in the middle of the rock,

882 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

cover it up, and light it. The rock would then be blown to pieces, and we could let King out."

"But suppose that were to make a dreadful noise—wouldn't he be frightened?"

"Then let him be frightened!" replied Stasch quickly. "That is the least thing that worries me. Nell, it really is not worth while talking seriously to you."

Nevertheless he continued talking, or rather thinking aloud:

"If too little powder be used the rock will not split, and the powder will be wasted, and yet if enough be put in there will not be much left over; besides, if it were to explode prematurely we might be killed. Then what would be left to hunt with, what to defend us with in case of an attack? You know quite well that if I had not had this rifle and these cartridges we should long since have lost our lives, either when in Gebhr's hands or from starvation. We are lucky, too, in having horses, for by ourselves we could not carry either the baggage or the cartridges."

Thereupon Nell put out her forefinger and said very emphatically:

"If I tell King to do it, he will carry everything."

"What burdens will he have to carry; we have very few things left."

"Nevertheless, he will protect us——"

"But he can not shoot game with his trunk as I can with my rifle."

"Well, we can eat figs and the large pumpkin-like fruits that grow on the trees, and Kali can catch fish."

"Yes, as long as we stay near a stream. We must stay here and wait until the rainy season is over, for these continual showers are sure to give you the fever. Remember that we must continue our journey later, and we may possibly strike a desert."

"Like the Sahara?" asked Nell, much alarmed.

"No; but one without streams and fruit-trees and acacias and mimosas. In a place like that one can only live on game. King would find grass, and I antelopes, but if I have nothing to shoot them with King could not capture them."

Stasch certainly had reason to be worried, for now that the elephant was tame and had become so well acquainted with them, it would not be right to desert him and leave him to starve; on the other hand, releasing him meant losing most of the ammunition and certainly risking death.

And so Stasch put the work off from day to day, every evening repeating to himself: "Perhaps I may think of some other way to-morrow."

Meanwhile other troubles came upon them.

In the first place Kali had been terribly tortured by bees when he went far down the stream after a rather small gray-green bird, a so-called bee-hawk, well known in Africa. The

black boy had been too lazy to smoke the bees out, and although he returned with some honey, he was so stung and swollen that an hour later he became unconscious. The "good Msimu," with Mea's assistance, drew out the poisonous stings, and then quickly made him poultices of wet mud. But toward morning it seemed as though the poor negro would die. Fortunately, good care and a strong constitution triumphed, but it was ten days before he regained his usual health.

In the second place, something had gone wrong with the horses. Stasch, who was obliged to tie them up and lead them to water during Kali's illness, discovered that they were beginning to get very lean. This certainly was not caused by insufficient food, for the grass was very luxuriant after the rain, making very good pasture. And yet the horses dwindled before his eyes. A few days later their hair began to fall out, their eyes had lost their brilliancy, and a thick slime ran from their nostrils. Finally they refused to graze, and drank a great deal, as though consumed by fever. When Kali saw them they were nothing but skin and bones, and he knew at once what was the matter.

"Tsetse!" said he, turning to Stasch. "They must die!"

Stasch knew what this meant, for in Port Said he had often heard of an African fly called "tsetse," which is such a terrible plague in cer-

tain places that in districts permanently infected with it the negroes own no cattle, for where circumstances favor its multiplying it destroys animals in no time. Horses, cattle, and donkeys which have been bitten by the tsetse-fly pine and die in a few days. Animals inhabiting these districts know the danger that threatens them, for entire herds of cattle, on hearing the buzzing near their watering-places, are so frightened that they stampede in every direction.

Stasch's horses had been stung by these flies, and not only the horses, but the donkey, too. Kali rubbed them daily with a plant that smelled like an onion, which he found in the jungle. He said that the smell of it would drive away the "tsetse"; but notwithstanding all his efforts the horses continued to grow thinner. Stasch was terrified when he thought of what would happen if all the animals were to die. How could Nell, the rugs, the tent, the cartridges, and the crockery be taken along? There were so many things that at best King was the only one who could carry them. But to release King would mean sacrificing two-thirds of the gunpowder.

Further and greater troubles were now heaped on Stasch's head, like the clouds in the heavens, which rained down incessantly in the jungle. And at last came the greatest misfortune, the one before which everything else seemed as nothing—the fever.

CHAPTER IX

ONE day at table, just as Nell was putting a small piece of smoked meat into her mouth, she drew back suddenly, as if disgusted, and said:

"I can't eat anything to-day."

Stasch, who had found out from Kali where the bees were, and had smoked them out daily and taken the honey, was certain that the child had eaten too much of the sweets, and therefore he paid no further attention to her loss of appetite. But presently she arose and began to run quickly round and round the camp-fire, each time making larger circles.

"Don't go too far away," called the boy to her; "something might happen to you."

But he was not afraid of any harm coming to her, for the presence of the elephant, whom the wild animals scented, and his trumpeting, that reached their keen, attentive ears, kept them at a respectful distance. This afforded protection to them as well as their horses, because even the most ferocious beasts of prey in the jungle, such as lions, panthers, and leopards, do not care to come in contact with an elephant, or in too close proximity to his tusks and trunk.

As the girl continued running faster and faster around the fire, Stasch followed her and asked:

"Nell, you little moth, why do you run around the fire like that?"

Though he asked this in a cheerful voice, he had begun to be alarmed, and his uneasiness increased as Nell answered:

"I don't know; I can't sit still in one place."

"What's the matter?"

"I feel so uncomfortable and queer——"

All at once she leaned her head on his shoulder, as if confessing a fault, and cried out in a voice stifled by tears:

"Stasch, I must be ill."

"Nell!"

At the same time he laid the palm of his hand on her forehead, which felt dry and as cold as ice. Then he took her in his arms and carried her to the camp-fire.

"Are you cold?" he asked on the way.

"Cold and hot, but mostly cold."

Her teeth began to chatter, and her body was shaking with chills. Stasch was now convinced that Nell had the fever.

He told Mea to take her at once into the tree, to undress her, and put her to bed. Then he covered her up with everything he could find, for he had noticed that in Khartum and Fashoda fever patients covered themselves up with sheep skins to induce perspiration. He decided to stay with Nell all night and give her hot water and mead to drink. At first she did not want to take it. By the light of their rudely made lamp Stasch noticed the glistening pupils of her eyes. Soon she began complaining of the heat and shivering at the same

338 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

time, although covered with felt rugs and a shawl. Her hands and forehead were always cold, but if Stasch had only had a slight knowledge of the symptoms of the fever he would have seen from her great restlessness that she must have a very high temperature. He was terrified on noticing that when Mea appeared with hot water the girl looked at her with astonishment, even with fear, and did not seem to recognize her at first. But with him she talked rationally, told him that she could not lie down any longer, and begged him to let her get up and run about. Then she asked him whether he was angry with her for being ill, and on his assuring her that this was not the case she blinked to drive back her tears, and promised that she would be well the next day.

During this evening, or rather this night, the elephant was particularly restless and roared incessantly, which set Saba barking again. Stasch perceived that this excited the patient, and so he left the tree to quiet the animals. Saba was easily pacified, but it was more difficult to silence the elephant, and Stasch threw several melons down to him so as to close his trunk for a while. On his return he saw by the light of the fire Kali walking in the direction of the stream and carrying a piece of smoked meat on his shoulder.

"What are you doing, and where are you going?" he asked the negro.

The black boy stood still, and as Stasch approached he said with an air of secrecy:

"Kali goes to the other tree to place meat there for the bad Msimu."

"Why!"

"So the bad Msimu will not kill good Msimu."

Stasch wanted to reply, but a strange pain pressed like a weight on his chest, so he only bit his lips and went silently away.

When he returned to the tree Nell had closed her eyes; her hands, which lay on the felt rug, were trembling very much, but still she appeared to be dozing. Stasch sat down by her side, and as he was afraid of awaking her, he remained there motionless for some time. Mea, who was seated on the other side, toyed all the time with the little pieces of ivory hanging in her ears in order to keep awake. It had become very quiet, and only from the lower bed of the stream, in the direction of the swamp, could the croaking of the frogs and the mournful tooting of the toads be heard.

Suddenly Nell raised herself up in bed.

"Stasch!"

"Here I am, Nell."

Then, shaking like a leaf blown by the wind, she eagerly began to search for his hand and to repeat hastily:

"I'm frightened; I'm frightened! Give me your hand!"

"Don't be frightened. I'm here with you."

840 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

And he grasped her hand, which now burned like fire, and having no idea what to do, he began to cover the poor, wretched little hand with kisses.

"Don't be frightened, Nell; don't be frightened."

Then he gave her a drink of honey mixed with water, which had become cold. This time Nell drank greedily, and when he tried to take the cup away from her mouth she held his hands tight. The cold drink seemed to quiet her.

A long silence ensued. Half an hour later Nell raised herself up again, and there was a terrible expression of fright in her wide-open eyes.

"Stasch!"

"What is it, my dear?"

"Why," she asked in a trembling, uncertain voice, "why do Gebhr and Chamis walk around the tree and look in at me?"

Stasch suddenly felt as if thousands of ants had taken possession of him.

"What are you talking about?" he said. "There's no one here. Kali is the only one walking around the tree."

But she stared through the dark opening and cried with chattering teeth:

"And the Bedouins! Why did you kill them?"

Stasch put his arm around her and pressed her to him.

"You know why! Don't look over there! Don't think of it! That happened long ago."

"To-day! To-day!——"

This had happened a long time ago, but it always came back to her like the wave that rolls back upon the shore, and it filled the mind of the sick child with horror. All attempts to quiet her were unavailing. Nell's eyes grew larger and larger. Her heart beat so hard that it seemed as if it would burst. Then she began to twist and throw herself around like a fish drawn out of the water, and that condition lasted till nearly morning. Not until daybreak did her strength give out and her little head sink back on the pillow.

"I'm weak, weak, weak!" she repeated. "Stasch, I seem to be falling down some place." And then she closed her eyes.

At first Stasch was overcome, for he thought she was dead. But this was only the end of the first paroxysm of this terrible and treacherous African fever, two attacks of which are as much as a strong, robust person can stand—for nobody has ever survived a third attack. Travelers had often described the fever when at Mr. Rawlison's house in Port Said, and even more frequently the Catholic missionaries whom Mr. Tarkowski entertained on their way back to Europe had told about it. It seems that a second attack comes on after a few days, and a third, which, if it does not appear within two weeks, is not fatal, for then it is considered

342 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

to be the first attack of another case. Stasch knew that heavy doses of quinine alone could stop or alleviate the attacks, and he had not a particle of it left.

Seeing that Nell was still breathing, he became somewhat composed, and began to pray for her. In the meanwhile the sun appeared from behind the cliffs in the gorge, and it became bright daylight. The elephant was already demanding his breakfast, and from the direction of the stream the screams of the water-birds could be heard. As the boy wanted to shoot some birds to make a broth for Nell, he took the rifle and walked along the edge of the stream to a group of high shrubs, in which the birds generally perched for the night. But he was so exhausted from loss of sleep, and his mind was so preoccupied with the thought of the girl's illness, that he did not see a swarm of birds, walking slowly in single file, that passed him on their way to drink. Another reason why he did not see them was that he was constantly praying. He thought of the deaths of Gebhr and Chamis and the Bedouins, and lifting his eyes toward heaven, he said in a voice drowned with emotion: "Dear Lord, I did this for Nell, for Nell; for otherwise it would have been impossible to have regained our freedom—but if I committed a sin, punish me, but restore her to health——"

On the way he met Kali, who had gone to see if the wicked Msimu had eaten the meat

he had offered him the day before. The young negro, who loved the little "Bibi," prayed for her, too, but in quite a different way. For he told the wicked Msimu that if "Bibi" recovered he would bring him a piece of meat every day, but if she died he would—although he felt frightened and knew he would perish—tear the wicked Msimu's skin to shreds and cause him to remember him forever. But he took courage when he saw that the piece of meat he had placed there the day before had disappeared. It might have been devoured by a jackal, but then Msimu might have taken the form of a jackal.

Kali told Stasch of this favorable omen, but Stasch only gazed at him as if he did not understand, and went on his way. While vainly searching for birds in the shrubbery, he approached the stream. Its banks were thickly wooded with tall trees, from which hung, like stockings, nests of the Remizen—pretty little yellow birds with black wings—and also wasps' nests, shaped like large roses, and resembling gray blotting-paper. At one point the stream formed a fairly broad, swampy plain, which was partly overgrown with papyrus. In this swampy stretch of land were many flocks of water-birds. There were storks, like the European ones, and others with large, thick, hooked beaks; velvety black birds with blood-red feet, flamingoes, ibises, and white spoon-bills with pink wings and spoon

844 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

beaks, cranes with crowns on their heads, and a number of gulls, variegated or gray as mice, which, like tiny forest sprites, ran to and fro on their long, thin, straw-like legs.

Stasch shot two large, bright-colored ducks, and walking over dead white butterflies, which were strewn over the banks by the thousand, first making sure there were no crocodiles in the ford, he waded into the water and picked up the game. The shot had evidently frightened away the birds, for there remained only two marabouts, that stood near the water at a short distance away. They resembled two old men, with bald heads bowed down on their shoulders. They did not move. The boy took another look at their ugly food bags, hanging down on their breasts, then finding that the wasps were surrounding him, he returned to the camp.

Nell was still asleep, so he gave the ducks to Mea and then stretched himself out on a felt rug and at once fell into a heavy sleep. He did not awaken until the afternoon, a little earlier than Nell. The girl felt somewhat stronger, and being slightly refreshed, she drank some good, strong broth, arose and left the tree to look at King and the sun. Only now, by daylight, could be seen the ravages made by the fever in one night. Nell's skin was yellow and transparent, her lips were black, there were large circles under her eyes, and her little face looked much older. Notwithstand-

ing that she assured Stasch she felt quite strong, and even though she had drunk a large cup of soup on awakening, she was hardly able to drag herself to the edge of the gorge. Stasch was terrified at the thought of the second attack. He had no medicine, nor anything else to help her.

Meanwhile, there were several heavy showers every day, and this greatly increased the humidity in the air.

CHAPTER X

THEY passed anxious days awaiting the return of the fever, but the second attack did not appear for a week, and though it was not so violent as the previous one, Nell felt much weaker after it. She had become so thin and had lost so much weight that she did not look like a girl, but rather like the ghost of a girl. The little flame of her life flickered so feebly that it seemed as if a breath would blow it out. Stasch realized that death would not have to wait for a third attack to carry her off, and he expected her death from day to day, even from hour to hour.

He, too, had become quite thin and dark, for these misfortunes were more than his bodily and mental strength could stand. Each day as he looked into Nell's face he often said to himself, "My reward for having cherished her as the apple of my eye will be the privilege of

346 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

burying her in the jungle!" Why it should have come to this he could not imagine. At times he reproached himself for not having taken sufficient care of her, and for not having treated her as kindly as he should, and then he felt such a pain in his heart that he could have bitten his fingers for grief. This misfortune was overwhelming.

Nell now slept almost continually, which perhaps saved her life. But Stasch awakened her several times during the day to give her some strengthening food. Whenever it was not raining she would beg him to carry her out into the open air, for she was unable to stand. It often happened that she went to sleep even as he carried her in his arms. She knew that she was very ill, and that she might die at any time. At first, when she was a little better and felt inclined, she would talk about it to Stasch, all the time crying, for she was afraid of death.

"I shall never return to papa," she once said. "But you must tell him that the thought of it made me very sorry, and ask him to come here to me."

"You will return," answered Stasch.

But he was unable to say any more, for he wanted to cry.

And Nell continued in a scarcely audible and sleepy voice:

"And papa will come here, and you will come back here again, too, won't you?" At

this thought a smile lit up her tiny, wan face, and then she whispered still more softly:

"But I am so sorry——"

At the same time she leaned her little head on his shoulder and began to cry, but he, conquering his own emotion, pressed her to his heart, and answered quickly:

"Nell, without you I shall not return, and—and in fact I don't even know what I should do without you."

Both became silent, and Nell fell asleep again. Stasch carried her back to the tree, but hardly had he stepped out of the dwelling than Kali came running down from the highest point of the neck of land, gesticulating with his hands, and crying out in an excited and terrified voice:

"Great Man, Great Man!"

"What do you want?" asked Stasch.

And the negro extended his hand, pointing to the south, and cried, "Smoke!"

Shading his eyes with the hollow of his hand, Stasch gazed attentively in the direction indicated, the red light of the setting sun enabling him to see a column of smoke ascending in the midst of the jungle between the peaks of two rather high hills.

Kali trembled from head to foot, for he still had a vivid recollection of their capture by the Dervishes, and he felt sure that the smoke came from their camp.

At last Stasch also thought that it must

come from Smain's camp, and so for a moment he was as much frightened as Kali. This was the climax—to have, in addition to Nell's deadly illness, the Dervishes come upon them, to be taken prisoners again, and carried back to Fashoda or Khartum in the hands of the Mahdi, or under Abdullah's whip! If they should be captured Nell would doubtless die the very first day, and he would be a slave for life. For, even if he were to escape, what was life, what was freedom without Nell? How could he look into the eyes of his father or Mr. Rawlison if the Dervishes were to throw Nell's body to the hyenas and he could not tell where her grave was?

Such thoughts shot through his head like lightning. Suddenly he felt an uncontrollable desire to look at Nell, and he went toward the tree. On the way he ordered Kali to put out the fire, and forbade him building it during the night; then he entered the tree.

Nell was not asleep. She felt better, as she immediately told Stasch. Saba lay at her side and warmed her with his enormous body; she softly stroked his head and smiled when he tried to catch the little grains of mold that were flying about in the streak of light which the last rays of the setting sun threw into the hollow of the tree. She was evidently in a more cheerful mood than usual, for a little later she turned to Stasch quite pleased and said:

"Perhaps I may not die after all."

"You certainly will not die," answered Stasch, "for as you feel stronger after the second attack, you will never have a third."

And she began blinking as if trying to recollect something and then said:

"If I only had another little bitter powder, like the one that did me so much good the night after the lion visited us; you remember, don't you? Then I should not even think of dying—not even so much——"

And with one of her little fingers she indicated how little she would be prepared for death in such a case.

"Ah!" cried Stasch excitedly, "what would I not give for a grain of quinine! I don't know what!"

And he thought to himself that if he had enough quinine he would not hesitate to give Nell two little powders at once, then wrap her up in the shawl, place her on his horse, and go off immediately in the opposite direction from the camp of the Dervishes.

Meanwhile the sun had gone down suddenly and the jungle was in darkness. The girl talked for nearly half an hour, and then went to sleep, and Stasch continued to think about the Dervishes and the quinine. Although tortured by sorrow and fright, his extraordinarily clever brain began to build more and more daring plans. In the first place, he thought whether or not this smoke seen in the south was bound to come from Smain's camp. It cer-

tainly might come from the Dervishes' camp, but also from an encampment of Arabians, who penetrate the interior of the continent in search of ivory and slaves. These Arabs were in no wise connected with the Dervishes, who ruined their trade. It might also be a camp of Abyssinians, or some negro village in the mountains, into which the hunters after human beings had not yet penetrated. Would it not be more sensible to find out what it really was?

The Arabians of Zanzibar, from the districts of Bogamajo, Witu, and Mombasa, and the seashore, continually came in contact with the whites, and who could tell if the offer of a large reward would not induce them to conduct Stasch and Nell to one of the nearest seaports. Stasch knew quite well that he could promise them such a reward, and that they would believe his word. But another thought caused him great uneasiness, for he noticed that the Dervishes, especially those from Nubia, were almost as susceptible to fever in Khartum as the whites, and that they cured themselves with quinine, stealing it from the Europeans, or if the renegade Greeks or Copts had any secreted, they bought it at a great price. And so it was probable that the Arabians from the borders of the ocean would certainly have some of it.

"I will go there," said Stasch to himself; "for Nell's sake, I will go there!"

On thinking the matter over more carefully, he came to the conclusion that even if they should prove to be Smain's party, he would have to go there. It occurred to him that, owing to the complete rupture between Egypt and Sudan, Smain might not have heard that they had been carried away from Fayoum. Fatima did not like Smain, and so the kidnapping must have been a plan of her own, which had been executed with the aid of Chamis (the son of Chadigi), and also of Idris, Gebhr, and the Bedouins. Now, Smain was not at all interested in any of these people, for the simple reason that Chamis was the only one of them that he knew, and he had never seen or heard of the others. He was only interested in his own children and Fatima. Perhaps he longed as much for them as they did for him, and would be glad to be able to return to them, especially if he were tired of being in the service of the Mahdi. He surely had not won a great prize while with them, for instead of being placed in command of a large army, or made ruler over a wide extent of territory, he was obliged to go, heaven knows how far back of Fashoda, to capture slaves! "I shall say to him," thought Stasch, "If you will lead us to some harbor on the Indian Ocean and return with us to Egypt, the government will forgive you everything, and you will be able to rejoin your children and Fatima, besides which Mr. Rawlison will make you a rich man—if not,

you will never see your children or Fatima again.' ”

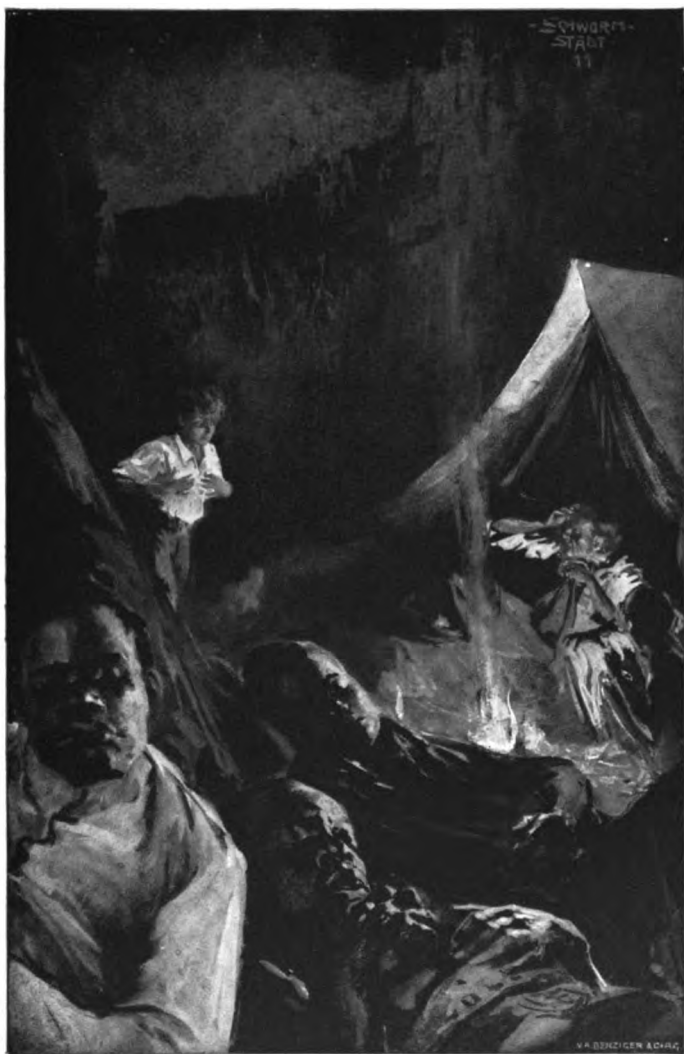
He was certain that Smain would think well of it and that he would scarcely refuse such an offer.

Of course this was only a surmise. In fact, while an investigation might prove their destruction, it might also prove their deliverance, and the only means of help in this African wilderness. Stasch felt surprised at himself for being terror-stricken at first at the thought of meeting Smain, but as it was necessary to procure assistance for Nell as soon as possible, he decided to go there that very night.

This was easier said than done. It is one thing to sit at evening before a fire in the jungle, behind a hedge of thorns, and another to penetrate the dense darkness and wade through the high grass, in which lions, panthers, and leopards, not to mention hyenas and jackals, prowl at this time of night. But the boy remembered what the young negro said the time when he went off one night in search of Saba and brought him back, “Kali is afraid, but he goes!” and he repeated to himself, “I may be afraid, but I will go.”

As the night was very dark, he waited until the moon rose, and when its light shone out over the jungle he called Kali and said:

“Kali, put Saba inside the tree, and block up the opening with thorns; you and Mea must guard the little lady as the apple of your eye



"On a canvas camp-stand lay a person wearing white European clothes. . . . A row of negroes were sleeping on either side of the tent."—PAGE 358.

while I go to see what kind of people are over there in that camp."

"Great Man take Kali with him and also the rifle which kills wild beasts. Kali not stay behind!"

"You will remain," said Stasch with decision. "I forbid you to follow me."

He now paused a while, and then continued in a rather hoarse voice:

"Kali, you are faithful and smart, and I hope that you will do what I tell you. Should I not return, and should the little lady die, you must leave her in the tree, but round it you must erect a high hedge, and carve a mark like this in the bark——"

And picking up two bamboo sticks, he placed them together like a cross, and continued:

"And should I not return, and should Bibi not die, then you must serve her faithfully and respectfully, and you must lead her to your people, and tell the Wa-hima warriors to take her due east until the great ocean is reached. There you will find white people, who will give you weapons, gunpowder, glass beads, wire, and as much canvas as you can possibly carry. Do you understand?"

But the young negro knelt before him, clasped him round the knees, and sorrowfully pleaded with him, repeating:

"Oh, Bwana Kubwa! Return, return, return!"

854 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Stasch was touched by the attachment of the black boy, and leaning down, he placed his hand on his head and said:

"Kali, go to the tree—and—God bless you!"

As he stood there alone, he thought about taking the donkey with him. It would certainly be safe to do so, for the lions in Africa (just as the tigers in India), on meeting a man riding, always attack the animal and not the man. But the question then presented itself that if the donkey were killed, who would carry Nell's tent, and on what would she ride? When he thought of these contingencies he completely gave up the idea of taking the animal along, and began making his way through the jungle on foot.

The moon was already fairly high in the heavens, and it was now much lighter. But the boy's troubles began at once, for he disappeared in the grass, which had grown so high that horse and rider could easily have hidden in it. Even in the daytime it was not possible to see a foot ahead, so one can imagine what it was by night, when the moonlight only shone over the surface, and lower down everything was bathed in utter darkness. Under such conditions it was easy to lose one's way and travel in a circle instead of advancing. But Stasch took courage when he thought, in the first place, that the camp to which he was traveling could be at the most only three or four English miles away from the neck of land, and secondly, that the

smoke had appeared between the peaks of two high hills; so by keeping the two hills in view he could not get lost.

But the grasses, mimosas, and acacias concealed everything. Fortunately, groups of ant-hills sometimes more than ten feet high, appeared here and there. Stasch carefully laid aside his gun when he came to each cluster of hills, and then he climbed to the top, and on seeing the hilltops outlined against the background of the dark sky, he climbed down again and continued his journey.

When he thought of what would happen if the sky should become overcast and the moon no longer shine, he was very much frightened. But that was not the only danger. In the dead silence of the night in the jungle every noise, every step, and almost every sound made by the insects as they creep through the grass can be heard. The sensation that comes over one is gruesome; and Stasch was terrified. He had to take precautions against all sorts of catastrophes. He was obliged to listen attentively, to keep watch on all sides, and to hold his head ready to turn round like a screw, and his rifle ready to shoot. Every minute it seemed as though some animal was lying in ambush, or was creeping up near him. From time to time he heard the grasses trembling and the tramping of animals running away. Then he thought that he must have frightened off the antelopes, for although one of their number always keeps

356 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

watch, they sleep very lightly, knowing full well that amateur hunters do not go out hunting in the dark at this time of night. But now he sees something dark, large, under an umbrella-acacia. It may be a rock, a rhinoceros, or a buffalo, which on scenting a human being will awaken and immediately advance to attack him, and he also sees two glittering things behind a black stone. "Ha!" Rifle to shoulder! "That's a lion! No!" False alarm! They are fireflies, for a tiny light rises in the air and glides over the grass, like a shooting star slanting downward. Stasch not only climbed the ant-hills to make sure that he was going in the right direction, but also to dry the cold perspiration which stood out on his forehead, to get his breath, and to wait until his heart should cease to palpitate. Besides, he was already so tired that he could hardly stand.

But he walked on, feeling that nothing must be left undone to save Nell. After two hours he came to a very stony place, where the grass was lower, and so it was much lighter.

The two peaks looked as far off as ever, but a little nearer there were some rocks running irregularly in a transverse direction, above which towered a taller rock, and they apparently encased a kind of valley or gorge, resembling the one in which King had been imprisoned. Now on the side of the cliff—about three or four hundred feet distant—he perceived the bright reflection of a flame.

He stood still. His heart was again beating so wildly that in the silence of the night he could hear it thump. Whom is he likely to encounter down there? Arabians from the eastern coast? Smain's Dervishes? Or savage negroes, who have left their native villages, and fleeing from the Dervishes, have taken refuge in the most impenetrable forest of the mountains? Will he there find death, or imprisonment, or perhaps help for Nell?

It was impossible for him to turn back now, and besides, he had no inclination to do so; he crept slowly toward the fire, stepping as lightly as possible, and holding his breath. After he had gone about a hundred steps, he suddenly heard the neighing of horses in the jungle, and he stood still. By the light of the moon he counted five. The Dervishes would have had more, so he supposed that the others were probably hidden in the tall grass. But he was surprised that no one was watching them, or that at least a fire had not been left burning in order to frighten off the wild beasts. He thanked God that things were as they were, for he could now advance without attracting attention.

The light of the fire on the cliff became still plainer. In less than a quarter of an hour Stasch reached a place where the cliff opposite him was brilliantly lighted, which satisfied him that a fire must be burning directly below it.

Crawling on all fours, he crept carefully up to the side and looked down.

358 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

The first object that attracted his attention was a large white tent. Before the tent stood a canvas camp-bed, and on it lay a person wearing white European clothes. A small negro, apparently about twelve years old, was throwing dry wood into the fire, which illuminated the side of the cliff, and a row of negroes were sleeping on either side of the tent. The next moment Stasch slid down the slope into the bottom of the gorge.

CHAPTER XI

FOR the moment he was so weary and excited that he was unable to utter a word, and stood there gasping for breath in front of the man, who lay on the bed, and who likewise remained silent, gazing at him with such utter amazement that he was all but dazed.

At last the man cried out:

"Nasibu! Are you there?"

"Yes, sir," answered the young negro.

"Do you see any one and is any one standing in front of me?"

But before the boy could answer Stasch regained his voice:

"Sir," he said, "my name is Stanislaus Tarkowski. I was captured by the Dervishes, and have escaped with little Miss Rawlison, and we are hiding in the jungle. But Nell is very ill, and I pray you to help us."

The stranger blinked at him, then passed

his hand across his forehead and said to himself:

"I not only see him, but hear him—it can not be imagination—What? Help? I need help myself. I'm wounded!"

But suddenly he shook himself, as if awakening from a dream or a trance, looked round, and regaining his presence of mind, said with a gleam of joy in his eyes:

"A white boy! I look upon a white being once more! Welcome, whoever you are. You said some one was ill. What do you want of me?"

Stasch repeated that this sick person was Nell, the daughter of Mr. Rawlison, one of the directors of the Suez Canal; that she had already had two attacks of fever, and unless he were able to procure some quinine to prevent a third attack she must die.

"Two attacks—that's bad!" answered the stranger. "But I can give you as much quinine as you want. I have several jars full of it, which I shall never need."

At these words he told Nasibu to hand him a large tin box, which evidently contained a small medicine chest, and he took out of it two rather large jars filled with a white powder, and handed them to Stasch.

"That is half of what I have left. It will last a year!"

At first Stasch felt inclined to cry aloud for joy, but he controlled himself and began to

360 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

thank his new friend as enthusiastically as though his own life were at stake.

The stranger nodded his head several times and said:

"Enough, enough. My name is Linde and I am a Swiss, from Zurich. Two days ago I met with an accident. A wild beast wounded me very severely."

Then he turned toward the black boy.

"Nasibu, fill my pipe."

Inclining toward Stasch, he continued:

"At night I always have more fever than in the daytime, and attacks of dizziness as well. But the pipe brightens me up and freshens my thoughts. You just said that you had escaped from the Dervishes, who held you captive, and that you had hidden in the jungle. Am I right?"

"Yes, sir; that is what I said."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"To flee to Abyssinia."

"You will fall into the hands of the Mahdists, for whole troupes of them are hanging around the frontier."

"But what else can we do?"

"Ah, only a month ago I could have been of assistance to you. But now I find myself at the mercy of God and this black boy."

Stasch looked at him in surprise.

"And this camp?"

"This is a camp of death."

"And these negroes?"

"These negroes are asleep, and they will never awaken again."

"I don't understand——"

"They are stricken with the sleeping-sickness.¹ They are from the shores of the great lakes, where this terrible sickness is always very prevalent, and every one of them who has not died of the smallpox has been stricken down with it. I have only one boy left."

It just occurred to Stasch that when he was sliding down the slope not one of those negroes had moved, nor even budged, and that during the whole conversation they were still sleeping, some with their heads propped up against the rocks and others with their heads hanging down on their chests.

"They are asleep and will never awaken?" he inquired, as if he could scarcely believe his ears.

Linde responded:

"Oh, this Africa is a house of death."

But the remaining words were interrupted by the tramping of the horses, which, frightened by something in the jungle, hopped along, their feet being hobbled, to the edge of the cliff, so as to be nearer the people and the fire-light.

"That's nothing; it is only the horses," said

¹It has lately been discovered that this same tsetse-fly innoculates people, as well as oxen and horses, with the fatal sleeping sickness, though it has been found that their sting only causes the sleeping sickness in some places. At the time of the revolt of the Mahdi the cause of this illness was not known.

362 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the Swiss quietly. "I captured them from the Mahdists, whom I conquered a few weeks ago. There were at least thirty men of them. But they were armed for the most part with spears, while my men had Remington rifles, which are now standing against the wall useless. If you need weapons or shot, help yourself. Take a horse, too. On horseback you can return more quickly to your patient. How old is she?"

"Eight years," answered Stasch.

"Then she is still a child. Nasibu will give you tea, rice, coffee, and wine for her. Take your choice of our provisions and as much as you want, and come again to-morrow to get some more."

"I will certainly come back, to thank you from the bottom of my heart, and to do all I can to help you."

Whereupon Linde said:

"It is so pleasant to see a European face at least once more before I die. If you come earlier than you did to-day I shall be more likely to be myself. Now the fever is coming on again, for I see you double. Are there two people standing by me? No! I know that you are alone and that this is only the fever. Oh, Africa!"

And he closed his eyes.

A quarter of an hour later Stasch left this strange camp of sleep and death and started on his return journey on horseback. It was still dark night, but he was oblivious of the dangers

which lurked in the tall grass. He kept close to the stream, supposing that it led nearer the end of this narrow pass. The return journey was a great deal easier, because he could hear the rushing of the waterfall in the distance. Besides, the clouds in the western sky had dispersed, and the constellations shone forth brightly near the moon. The boy put spurs, which were on the broad Arabian stirrups, to the horse, and galloped over sticks and stones, as he thought to himself: "What harm can lions and panthers do to me? I have quinine for my little girl." And from time to time he felt for the jars of quinine to make sure he really had them and that it was not all a dream. The most varied thoughts and scenes floated through his brain. He saw the wounded Swiss, to whom he felt inexpressibly grateful, and who had now aroused his sympathy, for during the first moment or so of his intercourse with him he had taken him for an idiot; he saw the little Nasibu, with his round head shaped like a ball, the rows of sleeping men, the barrels of the Remington guns propped up against the rock, and lighted up by the fire. Besides, he was also all but certain that the fight which Linde had told him about had been with Smain's division—and he felt a peculiar sensation as he thought perhaps Smain also had fallen.

These dreams mingled with his ever-present thoughts of Nell. He imagined how surprised she would be the next morning on seeing a

364 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

whole jar full of quinine, and how she would think him a prodigy. "Ah," he said to himself, "if I had lost courage and had not gone to find out where this smoke came from, I would never have forgiven myself."

After a short hour had elapsed the sound of the waterfall became quite distinct, and on hearing the croaking of the frogs, he knew that he must be near the silicious ground on which he had killed the water-birds the previous day. By the light of the moon he could even distinguish the distant trees. Now he had to be especially on his guard, for this swampy land served as a watering-place, to which all the animals in the vicinity were obliged to resort, because in other places the banks of the stream were exceedingly steep.

It was now far into the night, and apparently the beasts of prey had taken refuge in the clefts of the rocks after their nocturnal hunt for prey. The horse neighed a little on scenting the fresh trail of lions or panthers, but Stasch passed safely on, and soon saw on the high projection the large black silhouette of "Cracow." For the first time since he had been in the interior of Africa he felt as if he had reached home. He had expected to find them all still asleep, but he never thought of Saba, who now began to bark loud enough to wake the dead.

The next moment Kali stood in front of the tree and cried:

"Bwana Kubwa on horseback!"

The tone of his voice expressed more joy than astonishment, for his faith in Stasch's powers was so great that had the latter created a horse out of nothing, the black boy would not have been very much surprised. But as the negro always shows his happiness by laughing, he began to slap his sides and laugh inordinately.

"Tie up this horse," said Stasch; "take the provisions off his back, make a fire, and boil some water."

Then he went inside the tree. Nell was also awake and had been calling for him. On drawing aside the canvas, Stasch saw by the light of the little lamp her pale face and her little thin hands lying on the shawl, which served as a covering.

"Little one, how are you?" he asked quite gayly.

"Well! and I slept soundly until Saba woke me up. But why aren't you asleep?"

"Because I have been away."

"Where?"

"To the druggist's."

"To the druggist's?"

"Yes. To get some quinine."

We must confess that the child had not enjoyed the quinine powders which she had previously taken, but as she considered them a panacea for all the ills flesh is heir to, she sighed and said:

"I know you have no more quinine."

Stasch lifted one of the jars to the light and said with pride and joy:

"What do you call this, then?"

Nell would not believe her eyes, so he continued hastily, brimming over with pleasure:

"Now you are going to get well again! I will lose no time in wrapping a good dose up in the skin of a fresh fig, and you must swallow it, and what you will drink later remains to be seen. Why do you stare at me like an idiot? Yes, I have a second jar, too. I received both of them from a white man, whose camp is about four miles from here. It is from him that I have come. His name is Linde, and he is wounded, but he gave me many nice things to bring back. I returned on horseback, although I went on foot. Do you think it is pleasant to go through the jungle by night? Brr! I would not go a second time unless it were a matter of getting quinine."

With these words he left the astonished girl, went to the men's quarters, and selecting the smallest fig from the provisions, hollowed it out and poured quinine into it, but he was very careful that the dose was larger than the powders he had taken in Khartum. Then he left the tree, poured the tea into a pot of boiling water, and returned to Nell with the medicine.

All this time Nell was very curious to find

out what kind of person this white man was, how Stasch had found him, and if he were going to join them, and whether they would all continue their journey together. Now that Stasch had obtained the quinine, she had not the least doubt but that she would recover. And so Stasch had gone through the jungle in the night, and without telling a soul. Notwithstanding Nell's admiration for him, she had until now unconsciously taken everything he did for her as a matter of course; for was it not natural that an older boy should protect a younger girl? Now she began to think that had it not been for his care and protection she would have given out long before; that he had done a great deal for her, gratified all her wishes, and protected her as no other boy of his age could have done, or would do—and so her little heart was filled with gratitude.

And when Stasch reappeared and bent over her with the medicine, she wound her little thin arms around his neck and hugged him tight.

"Stasch, you are very good to me!"

And he replied:

"I! To whom else ought I be good? That's a great idea! Take this medicine."

Nevertheless, he was greatly pleased, his eyes shone with satisfaction, and turning toward the opening in the tree, he cried out in a voice full of joy and pride:

"Mea! Now bring Bibi the tea!"

CHAPTER XII

IT WAS not until toward noon the following day that Stasch started out to revisit Linde, because he had to make up for the sleep he had lost the night before.

Thinking that the sick man might need some fresh meat, he killed two birds on the way, which were much appreciated. Linde was very weak, but perfectly rational. As soon as they had exchanged greetings he inquired how Nell was; then he told Stasch that he did not think quinine alone would cure the fever, and said that he must guard the little one against the sun's rays, dampness, spending the night in low, damp places, and finally against bad water. Then, as requested, Stasch narrated his own and Nell's adventures from the beginning as far as their arrival in Khartum and their visit to the Mahdi, and from Fashoda to their escape from Gebhr's hands, and also their later wanderings. During this story the Swiss looked at him with growing curiosity, and often even with evident admiration, and as the tale approached its end he lighted his pipe, looked at Stasch once more from head to foot, and, apparently lost in thought, said:

"If there are many boys like you in your country, it will be hard to conquer you."

And after a short silence he continued:

"The best proof of the truth of your words is the fact that you are standing here before

me. And what I want to say to you is this, that you are in a terrible predicament; the route, no matter which direction you take, is beset with dangers, but who knows whether such a brave boy as you can not safely lead both himself and that child out of this great wilderness!"

"If Nell would only get well again I will do everything in my power," cried Stasch.

"But you must take care of yourself, too, for the work that lies before you would tax the strength of a full-grown man. Have you ever thought where you are?"

"No; I only remember that after leaving Fashoda we passed a river—near a large settlement called Deng."

"The river Sobat!" interrupted Linde.

"At Deng there were many Dervishes and negroes. But on the other side of the Sobat we entered into a region of jungle, and marched for weeks until we arrived at the gorge, in which you know what took place——"

"I know. You then went on through the gorge till you came to that stream. Well, now listen; it is obvious that after passing over the Sobat with the Sudanese you turned off to the southeast, or a little more toward the south. The country you now happen to be in is unknown to explorers and geographers. This river near us runs northwest, and probably empties into the Nile. I say probably, for I am not quite sure myself, although I turned

370 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

off from the mountains of Karamajo to discover its source. After the fight the captured Dervishes told me that it was called Ogeloguier, but even they were not sure, for they only go into this district to hunt slaves. This land was for the most part sparsely inhabited by the Schilluks; but now the country is devoid of human beings, for some of the people have died of smallpox, others have been killed by the Dervishes, and still others have fled into the mountains of Karamajo. It often happens in Africa that a stretch of land thickly populated to-day becomes a wilderness to-morrow. I calculate that you are about 800 kilometers distant from Lado. In fact, you might take refuge with Ermin in Sudan, but as it is quite likely that Ermin himself is besieged by the Dervishes, that course is out of the question."

"How about going to Abyssinia?" asked Stasch.

"It is also nearly 800 kilometers distant. Besides that, one must reckon that the Mahdi is now at war with the whole world, consequently with Abyssinia. Besides, I have heard from the prisoners that bands of Dervishes are wandering in the western and southern districts, and you might easily fall into their hands. Abyssinia is certainly a Christian land, but the savage races to the south are either heathens or believers in Islam, and for that reason they secretly sympathize with the Mahdi. No; you can not go through that country."

"Then what shall I do, and where shall I go with Nell?" asked Stasch.

"I told you that you are in a difficult position," murmured Linde; then he covered his head with his hands and remained silent a while.

"From here to the ocean," he at last said, "would be more than 900 kilometers, through mountain regions, wild tribes, and even desert places, for on the way there are supposed to be large tracts of arid land. But nominally the country belongs to England. One might strike caravans of ivory on their way to Kismaya-Lam and Mombasa, perhaps even meet missionary expeditions. When I saw that, owing to the Dervishes, I could not escape the course of this river, as it turns off toward the Nile, I made up my mind to go east toward the ocean."

"Then we will return together!" cried Stasch.

"I shall never return. The *Ndiri* beast tore my sinews and veins so terribly that blood poisoning must certainly set in. Only a surgeon could save me by amputating my leg. Now it has dried up and stiffened, but on the first day the pain was so great that I bit into my hands and——"

"You will certainly get well."

"No, my brave boy, I shall surely die, and you must cover me well with stones, so that the hyenas can not dig me up. This is perhaps of little consequence to the dead, but while alive it is not a pleasant thought. It is

372 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

hard to have to die so far away from one's family."

At these words his eyes became veiled, and after a while he continued:

"But I have become accustomed to the thought, so let us now talk about you, not about me. I will give you one piece of advice: There is only one road for you to take, which is to the east toward the ocean. But before attempting this journey you should rest well and gather strength; otherwise your little companion will die in a few weeks. Postpone the journey until the rainy season is over and perhaps even longer. The first months of summer, when it has ceased raining, and the water still covers the swamps, are the most healthful. This place, where we now are, is an elevated plateau lying nearly seven hundred feet above the level of the sea. In high regions of one thousand three hundred feet there is no fever, and if by chance it be carried there from places of lower altitude, it assumes a much milder form. Take the little English girl and go into the mountains with her."

Talking evidently tired him very much, and so he paused once more, and for a time fought off large blue flies—the same kind that Stasch had seen in Fashoda.

Then he resumed:

"Pay strict attention to what I am going to tell you. One day's journey toward the south you will see an isolated mountain, not more

than eight hundred feet high. It looks like an overturned saucepan; its sides are very steep. The only way to reach it is by a mountain pass so narrow that in some places two horses can barely walk abreast. On its flat summit, about a kilometer broad, there used to be a small negro village, but the Mahdists have killed some of the inhabitants and have taken others away with them. It may be that this was done by the very Smain I conquered, but whose slaves I could not capture because he had already sent them under heavy guard toward the Nile. Up there on the top is a spring of excellent water, several fields of manioc and a quantity of banana-trees. You will also find there many human bones, but you need not fear that these corpses will produce a plague, for after the Dervishes left the ants drove us away from the plain. Other than these, not a human soul! Remain one or two months in that village. At that height there is no fever. The nights are cool. There your little one will regain her health and you your strength."

"And then what shall I do, and where shall I go?"

"Leave the rest to the guidance of God. By all means try to go toward the places in Abyssinia which are furthest away from the Dervishes, but go toward the east. I have heard that the Arabians, hunting for ivory, which they get from the Samburu and Wa-hima tribes, advance as far as a certain lake."

374 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

Now Stasch began to tell Linde how he had obtained Kali (Gebhr's servant) after Gebhr's death, and also that the young negro had said that he was the son of the chief of the Wahimas.

But Linde was much more indifferent to this news than Stasch had expected.

"All the better," he said, "for he can be of use to you. Among the blacks there are kind souls, although on the whole one can not depend on their gratitude, because they are but children still, and forget to-day what happened yesterday."

"Kali will not forget that I saved him from Gebhr—I'm sure of that."

"Possibly," said Linde, and pointing to Nasibu, he added:

"He is also a good child. Take care of him after my death."

"Don't always think of death, and don't talk of it."

"My dear," answered the Swiss, "I long for it—all I hope is that it will take place without further suffering. Just think, I am now quite helpless, and if one of the Mahdists whose band I dispersed should accidentally wander through this narrow pass, he could slaughter me like a lamb single-handed."

He pointed to the sleeping negroes, and resumed:

"These will never wake, or, more correctly, each one will wake once again shortly before

his death, and will run madly through the jungle, from which he will never return. Out of two hundred people there were only sixty left me. Many ran away, died of smallpox, or lay down to die in other gorges."

Stasch gazed at the negroes, his heart full of horror and pity. Their bodies were of an ashy gray, which in the negro signifies pallor. The eyes of some were tightly closed, of others half open, but even these were sleeping soundly, for the pupils of their eyes were not sensitive to the light. The knee-joints of some were swollen. All were so terribly emaciated that their ribs could be seen through their skin. Their hands and feet shook incessantly and rapidly. Blue flies had settled in thick masses on their eyes and lips.

"Is there no help for them?" asked Stasch.

"No. In the district of the Victoria-Nyanza this illness kills the inhabitants of entire villages. Sometimes it is worse than at others. The inhabitants of the villages lying in the woods near its banks are most frequently attacked."

The sun was already in the west, but before evening Linde had told Stasch of his adventures. He said he was the son of a merchant in Zurich, that his family had come from Karlsruhe, and that in the year 1848 they had settled in Switzerland. His father had made a great fortune as a silk merchant. He had his son trained as an engineer, but young Henry

876 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

from his earliest youth was beset with the idea of traveling. When he graduated from the Polytechnic School he inherited the entire fortune of his father, and then started on his first journey to Egypt. This took place before the time of the Mahdi, and so he got as far as Khartum, and hunted in the Sudan with the Dongalese. He then devoted himself to studying the geography of Africa, in which he so excelled that he belonged to many geographical societies. This last journey, which was to terminate so badly for him, had been undertaken from Zanzibar. He had got as far as the great lakes and intended to advance along the unexplored mountains of Karamajo as far as Abyssinia, and from there to the borders of the sea. But the people of Zanzibar would not accompany him any further. Fortunately, or unfortunately, war was at that time raging between the kings of Uganda and Unyoro. Linde materially assisted the king of Uganda, and the latter as a reward gave him more than two hundred black *Agisis*. That naturally greatly facilitated the journey and the visit to the Karamajo Mountains, but just then the smallpox broke out among the people, followed by the terrible sleeping-sickness, and at last the caravan was demoralized and destroyed.

Linde had with him quantities of provisions, consisting of all kinds of canned goods, but as he dreaded the scurvy, he hunted daily for fresh

meat. He was a splendid shot, but not a very cautious hunter.

And so it happened that a few days before, when he had foolishly approached too near a wounded *Ndiri* wild boar, the animal sprang up, tore his leg terribly, and wounded him in the back. This happened quite near this camp, and in full view of Nasibu, who tore up his own shirt and made a bandage of it to stop the flow of blood, and brought the wounded man back to the tent. But as the result of internal bleeding, clumps of coagulated blood formed, and the patient was threatened with gangrene.

Stasch insisted on bandaging him, and declared that either he would come to see him every day, or—so as not to leave Nell alone in the care of the two negroes—put him on a felt rug stretched out between two horses and bring him to “Cracow.” Linde was willing to let Stasch make a new bandage for him, but he would on no account listen to the thought of being removed.

“I know,” he said, pointing to his negroes, “that these people must die, but as long as death has not yet come to them I can not condemn them while alive to be torn to pieces by the hyenas, who are only kept at a distance during the night by the campfire.”

And he at once began to repeat feverishly: “I can not, I can not, I can not!”

However, he soon regained his composure,

378 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

and continued in a peculiarly sad, ringing voice:

"Come here to-morrow early. I have a great favor to ask of you, and if you grant it, God will perhaps lead you both out of this African hell, and I will die contented. I wanted to postpone this request until to-morrow, but as I may be unconscious to-morrow, I will tell you to-day. Pour water into a vessel, go up to each of these poor sleeping creatures, sprinkle water on his head, and say: 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.'"

This he said with a voice full of emotion, and then became silent.

"I blame myself," he said after a while, "that I did not take leave in the same way of those who died of the smallpox and of those who died even earlier. But now I am threatened with death—and would like to—that is, with the remainder of my caravan, go on this last great journey with them."

At these words he pointed with his hand to the flaming sky, and two large tears trickled slowly down his cheeks.

Stasch wept like a child.

CHAPTER XIII

ON THE following day the sun shone down on a strange scene. Stasch walked alongside of the steep cliff, stood still in front of each negro, poured water over each forehead

while making the sign of the cross, and at the same time pronounced the sacred words. And they slept—their hands and feet shaking, their heads sunk on their chests or held upright. Though still alive, they resembled corpses. In this manner the sleepers were baptized in the quiet of the morning, in the light of the sun, in the silence of the wilderness. The sky was cloudless, highly arched, gray-blue—as if shrouded in mourning.

Linde was still rational, but became weaker and weaker. After his bandage had been changed he gave Stasch some papers locked up in a tin box, and begged him to be especially careful of them; then he ceased to speak. He could not eat, but he was dreadfully tortured by thirst, and before sunset he became delirious. He called to some children, forbidding them to swim out so far in the lake; at last he began to have convulsions, and afterward sat holding his head in his hands.

On the following day he could not recognize Stasch, and three days later, at noon, he died without regaining consciousness. Stasch truly mourned for him a while, then he and Kali carried the body to a near-by cave, the opening of which they closed with thorns and stones.

Stasch took little Nasibu with him to "Cra-cow," and ordered Kali to stay there, to look after the provisions and keep a large fire burning near the sleepers at night. Stasch continually rode back and forth between the two

gorges, carrying back to "Cracow" baggage, weapons, and especially the cartridges for the Remington rifles, out of which he took the powder he needed to blast the rock that held King a prisoner. Fortunately Nell's health improved very much, owing to her daily dose of quinine, and the great variety of food had given her more appetite and increased her strength. Stasch left her very reluctantly, and as he felt that something might happen to her, he forbade her leaving the interior of the tree during his absence, and closed the opening with branches of thorny acacia. On account of the increasing duties which had fallen upon him, he was often obliged to leave her in the care of Mea, Nasibu and Saba, on whom, by the way, he chiefly relied. He preferred to ride several times a day to Linde's camp for provisions rather than leave the girl too long. This of course meant a great deal of work, but his iron nature was proof against all fatigue. It took ten days before the things were properly sorted; those not especially needed were done up in canvas and the necessary ones were deposited in "Cracow." The horses were also brought there, as were a large number of Remington rifles; these burdens would now fall to the lot of King.

While this was being done, some of the sleepers sprang up in their last paroxysm, fled wildly into the jungle, and never returned. But there were others who died on the spot, and

still others who rushed off blindly, dashing their heads to pieces on the rocks in or near the camp. Kali had to bury them. Two weeks later only one remained, and he soon expired in his sleep from exhaustion.

At last the time had come to blast the rock and release King. He was now so tame that at Stasch's command he lifted him with his trunk and set him up on his neck. He had also become accustomed to carrying the burdens which Kali put upon his back by means of a bamboo ladder. Nell was afraid that one of the pieces was too heavy for him, but the small load he had on his back seemed no heavier for him than a fly. It was only now that their baggage—increased by the things Linde had left them—would be burdensome for him. At first he showed great restlessness on the approach of Saba, but now he was quite friendly with the dog, and played with him by throwing him down on the ground with his trunk, whereupon Saba pretended to bite him. But sometimes he unexpectedly poured water over the dog, which, of course, the latter considered a very poor joke.

The children were especially pleased that the intelligent beast understood everything that was required of him, and that he not only paid the greatest attention to every command or request, but to every sign given him. Elephants far outstrip all other animals in this respect, and King greatly surpassed Saba, who only

382 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

wagged his tail at every command and threat from Nell, and then, in the end, did just what he pleased.

For instance, after several weeks King observed that the person to be implicitly obeyed was Stasch, and the person who engaged the attention of every one was Nell. And thus he obeyed Stasch's commands the most readily, and loved Nell the dearest. He did not care much for Kali and ignored Mea.

After Stasch had prepared the blast, he pushed it into the deepest crack, closed the opening with clay, and only left a tiny hole, out of which hung a fuse of twisted palm threads rubbed with ground powder. At last the decisive moment came. Stasch lighted the powdered thread himself, then ran for his life toward the tree, in which he had previously shut every one. Nell was afraid that King might become greatly alarmed, but the boy calmed her by saying that, in the first place, he had chosen a day when there had been a heavy thunderstorm in the morning, and, secondly, that wild elephants must have heard the peals of thunder more than once when the elementary forces of the heavens had been let loose over the jungle. But nevertheless they sat there with beating hearts, counting the seconds. At last a terrible noise shook the air. The bamboo-tree trembled from top to bottom, and the remains of the mold still left in the tree fell down on their heads. The next moment Stasch

sprang out, and avoiding the bends in the gorge, made a straight line for the passage.

The results of the explosion were extraordinary. One-half of the chalk wall had broken into tiny bits, the other into larger and smaller blocks of stone, which the force of the blast had thrown and scattered quite a distance.

The elephant was free.

The happy boy at once ran back up the hill, where he met Nell with Mea and Kali. King had certainly been frightened and had drawn back close to the edge of the ravine, where he stood with upturned trunk, looking toward the direction from which such an unusual clap of thunder had broken out. But as soon as Nell began to call him he stopped moving his ears from fright, and when she ran down to him through the newly opened passage he became perfectly calm. But the horses were more frightened than King, and two of them had fled into the jungle, so that Kali could not find them again until toward sunset. On the same day Nell led King back "into the world." The colossus followed her obediently, like a small dog. Then he took a bath in the stream, after which he thought of supper; so leaning his head against a large sycamore-tree, he bent it like a weak reed, and devoted all his attention to chewing up the fruit and leaves.

In the evening he returned punctually to the tree, and sticking his great nose into the opening every minute, he searched so carefully

and persistently for Nell that at last Stasch was obliged to give him a good smack on his trunk.

Kali was the most pleased with the result of the day, for now he was relieved from the task of collecting food for the giant, which had not been at all an easy matter. While preparing a fire to cook the supper Stasch and Nell heard him singing a new hymn of joy:

"The great man kill people and lions. Yah! Yah! Great man break up rock. Yah! Elephant breaks his own trees, and Kali can idle and eat. Yah! Yah!"

The "massika" or rainy season was nearly over. Of course there were still dark and rainy days, but also some very fine days. Stasch now decided to move over to the mountain, which Linde had told him about, and this plan was carried out soon after King's release. Nell's health no longer deterred him, for she was now decidedly better.

Selecting a fine morning, they broke up camp and started for the south. Now they were no longer afraid of being lost, for the boy had found among the many other articles of Linde's outfit a compass and an excellent telescope, through which far distant places could be plainly seen. Besides Saba, King, and the donkey, five heavily laden horses were taken along. King, in addition to the baggage on his back, carried Nell, who sat on his neck between the enormous ears. She looked as though

in a large armchair. Stasch left the peninsula-shaped promontory and the baobab-tree without regret, for the remembrance of Nell's illness clung to the place. But, on the other hand, the girl looked regretfully at the rocks, the tree, and the waterfall, and said that she would return again when she was "grown up."

But still sadder was the little Nasibu, who had really loved his former master. Now, as he rode on the donkey at the end of the caravan, he turned back every minute to look at the place where the body of poor Linde was to rest till the Day of Judgment.

The wind blew from the north, and the day was very cool. Consequently they did not need to rest from ten to three, the hours of the greatest heat, and therefore could go much further than caravans usually do in a day. The journey was not long, and a few hours after sunset Stasch perceived the mountain which was to be their destination. In the distance another chain of hills stood out against the sky, but the former was much nearer and stood out by itself like an island in the middle of a jungle sea. When they approached they saw that its precipitous sides were washed by an arm of the same river on the borders of which they had previously lived. Its summit was shaped like a round bowl, and seen from below, seemed to be completely covered by a thick forest. Stasch figured that as the strip of land in which their baobab-tree grew was 700 feet high, and this

386 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

mountain 800 feet higher, they would be living at an altitude of 1500 feet, and in a climate which could not be much hotter than that of Egypt. The thought gave him courage and made him desire to take possession of this natural fortress as quickly as possible.

They soon found the mountain-pass, which was the only means of reaching the summit, and immediately began to climb the mountain. An hour and a half later they had reached the top. The grove they thought they had seen from below proved to be not only a grove, but a banana-grove. The sight of this greatly pleased them all, including King; but Stasch was especially delighted, for he knew that in all Africa there is no food more strengthening, more healthful, and a better preventive against illness than flour made of dried bananas. And here was a year's supply.

Hidden in the foliage of these plants were negro huts, some of which had been burned during the invasion, and some destroyed by other means; however, a few remained in fair condition. In the middle stood the largest, which formerly belonged to the chief of the village. It had been tastefully constructed out of clay, with a broad roof forming a sort of veranda around the walls. Here and there in front of the huts lay single bones and also complete human skeletons, white as chalk, for they had been thoroughly cleaned by the ants, of whose invasion Linde had spoken. Many

weeks had passed since the invasion of the little insects, but in the hut there was still a strong scent of formic acid, and in the dwellings not a trace could be found of the large black cockroaches—which usually infest the mud huts of the negroes—or spiders, or scorpions, or any other vermin. Everything had been destroyed by the terrible “siafu,” and so one could feel confident that on the entire summit there was not a snake to be found, for even the boas fall victims to these unconquerable warriors.

After Stasch had led Nell and Mea into the chieftain's hut, he ordered Kali and Nasibu to clear away the human bones. The black boy obeyed by simply throwing them into the stream, and the force of the current carried them along. But during this work they discovered that Linde had made a mistake in telling them that they would not find a single living being on the mountain. The quiet which reigned after the kidnapping of the inhabitants by the Dervishes, and the tempting look of the bananas, had enticed a great many chimpanzees, which had arranged something resembling umbrellas, or small roofs, to protect them from the rain. Stasch did not want to kill them, so he decided to frighten them away by shooting into the air. This caused a general confusion, which increased when Saba's angry bark was heard, and King, excited by the noise, began to trumpet vociferously. But the monkeys did not have to seek far to find a means of retreat,

388 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

for they galloped to the edges of the cliff and let themselves down so quickly and with such agility by means of the trees growing alongside of the banks that King was unable to capture a single one with his trunk and tusks.

The sun had gone down, and Kali and Nasibu lighted a fire to cook the evening meal. After Stasch had unpacked the necessary things for the night, he wended his way to the chief's hut, of which Nell had already taken possession. In the hut it was light and cosy, for Nell did not light the small lamp that had served to illuminate the interior of the baobab-tree, but a large traveling lamp which they had found among Linde's things. As the day had been so cool, Nell did not feel particularly tired after the journey. She was in a cheerful frame of mind, which increased when Stasch told her that the bones, which had frightened her, had been cleared away.

"How good it is to be here," she said. "Look, even the ground is covered with asphalt. Here we shall live luxuriously."

"I shall wait till to-morrow before taking a good look at the whole settlement," answered he; "but from what I have already seen to-day I conclude that it would be a good place to live in all one's life."

"If our papas were here, yes, it would then be all right. But what shall we name this settlement?"

"In geographies this mountain is called

Linde Mountain, and this village is named 'Nell,' after you."

"So, then, I shall also be represented in geography," said she joyfully.

"Certainly; it will perpetuate your name," answered Stasch with great earnestness.

CHAPTER XIV

ON THE following day it rained a little, but as there were also some hours between showers, Stasch began as soon as possible to explore his surroundings, and by noon he had penetrated every corner. The inspection proved very satisfactory. In the first place, Linde Mountain was the most secure place in the whole of Africa. Monkeys alone could scale its heights. Neither lions nor panthers could climb the plateau. As to guarding the mountain pass, they had only to install King at the entrance and then lie down and go to sleep peacefully. Stasch was convinced that he could now resist attacks of small troupes of Dervishes, for the road leading to the mountain was very narrow, and one man alone, provided he had a good gun, could block the entrance so effectually that not a soul would be able to pass.

In the center of the "island" there bubbled forth a spring of cool, crystal-clear water, the outlet of which was a small brook that wound its way through the banana-grove and at last

890 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

plunged over the edge of an overhanging cliff into the river, thus forming a narrow waterfall, which glistened like a white ribbon. On the south side of the peninsula there were fields covered with a luxuriant growth of manioc roots, which are much relished by the negroes. Behind these fields grew very high cocoanut palms, their crowns shaped like beautiful feather-dusters.

A mass of jungle surrounded the "island," and the view was very extensive. On the east could be seen the blue chain of the Karamajo Mountains. On the south rose high hills, which, judging from their dark color, must have been covered with trees. On the west, however, the view extended to the horizon, where the jungle melted into the sky. But looking through Linde's telescope Stasch perceived various narrow passes, and here and there enormous trees, rising above the grasses like churches. In some places, where the grass had not as yet grown very high, one could see with the naked eye herds of antelopes and zebras, elephants and buffaloes. Here and there giraffes made paths through the gray-blue jungle like ships furrowing through the sea. Close to the edge of the river some waterbucks were playing, while others raised their horned heads above the deep water. In places where the surface of the water was calmer, every now and then fish, the same kind Kali had caught, would spring up, glitter like silver

stars and then sink back into the water. Stasch resolved that, as soon as the weather was better, he would take Nell around and show her the menagerie. There were no large animals on the island, but immense numbers of butterflies and birds. Large, snow-white parrots with black beaks and yellow breasts flew above the shrubbery, tiny whidah-birds, with beautiful plumage, glittering like jewels, swung from the thin stalks of manioc, and from the high branches of the cocoanut-tree could be heard the sound of the African cuckoo and the sad, soft cooing of the turtle-dove.

Stasch returned from his inspection feeling very happy.

"The air here is good," he said to himself; "this place is proof against attack, there is plenty of food to be had, and in fact it is a perfect Paradise."

But as he entered Nell's hut he saw that a larger animal had put in an appearance on the island—indeed, there were two—for during his absence Nasibu had found in the banana thicket a goat with her young one, which the Dervishes had been obliged to leave behind. The goat was indeed somewhat wild, but the young one immediately made friends with Nasibu, who was very proud that he had found her, for he thought that now "Bibi" would be able to have excellent milk every day.

"Stasch, what shall we do now?" asked Nell

392 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

one day, after they had settled down and grown accustomed to the island.

"There is plenty to do," answered the boy, and he counted on his outstretched fingers all the tasks awaiting them.

"To begin: Kali and Mea are heathens, and Nasibu, a child from Zanzibar, is a Mohammedan, and so everything must be explained to them; they must be taught the true Faith and baptized. In the second place, meat for the coming journey must be smoked, so I must shoot it; in the third place, as I have so many weapons and so much ammunition, I am going to teach Kali how to shoot, so that two of us will be armed and ready to act on the defensive; and, in the fourth place, have you forgotten about the flying kites?"

"The flying kites?"

"Yes, that you are going to glue together, or, better still, sew together. That will be your work."

"I want to do something besides play."

"That will by no means be play, but a very important work, perhaps the most important of all. Do not imagine that one kite will amount to anything; you must make fifty or more."

"Why so many?" asked the girl, grown curious.

Then Stasch began to tell her his plans and hopes. He wanted to write on each kite their names, how they had escaped from the Der-

vishes, where they were to be found, and where they expected to go. He was also going to write on them that they needed help, and to beg some one to send a telegram to Port Said. He intended to send up these kites only when the wind was southwest.

"Many of them," he said, "will soon fall to the ground, but if only one of them reaches the coast and falls into the hands of Europeans we are saved."

Nell was quite delighted with this idea, and declared that even King was not a match for Stasch when it came to cleverness. Yes, she was convinced that a great many of the kites would even fly to their papas, and promised to glue such kites from morning till night. Her joy was so excessive that Stasch was afraid it might bring on the fever again, and he was therefore obliged to calm her enthusiasm.

The work which Stasch had mentioned was immediately begun in earnest. Kali, who had been told to catch as many of the flying-fish as possible, stopped fishing, but on the other hand he erected a high fence of thin bamboo rods, or, to be more accurate, a kind of trellis, and this weir he fastened across the river. In the middle of the trellis was a large opening, through which the fish would be obliged to swim in order to reach the open water. At this opening Kali placed a strong net made from palm-threads, and so caught a plentiful supply of fish every day.

394 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

He drove the fish into the murderous net with the help of King, who, being led into the water, darkened and disturbed it so that not only those shimmering silver fish, but all other creatures living in the water, tried to escape into the clearer depths. At this point the weir was often damaged by crocodiles overturning the trellis in their efforts to escape, and King himself would often overturn it, for he cherished an inborn hatred against crocodiles. So he followed them, and as soon as they reached shallow water he would pick them up with his trunk and throw them on the bank, and he took the greatest satisfaction and delight in stamping them to death.

Turtles also were often caught in the net, and of them the little wanderers made a delicious soup. Kali prepared the fish by drying them in the sun, but the air-bladders he brought to Nell, who cut them in two, stretched them out on boards, and thus converted them into two sheets of paper the size of one's hand.

Stasch and Mea helped Nell in this work, for it was by no means easy. The skins were thicker than the bladders of our river fish, but after being dried they became quite brittle and were easily broken. Stasch at last discovered that they should be dried in the shade. But sometimes his patience was nearly exhausted, and that he did not give up the plan of making kites out of the bladders was due to the fact that he considered them lighter and better able

to withstand the rain than paper. Though the dry season had now begun, he was not quite sure whether, during the summer, especially in the mountains, there would not be showers.

But he also glued together kites made out of paper, a quantity of which had been found among Linde's effects. The first light, large paper kite, which he let loose in a west wind, at once rose very high, and when Stasch cut the string was carried by a strong current of air toward the chain of the Karamajo Mountains. Stasch followed its flight with the aid of a telescope until it got as small as a butterfly—yes, even until it looked like a fly—and at last disappeared in the pale azure of the sky. On the following day he loosed a second one, this time made of fish bladders, which ascended even more quickly into the air, but probably was soon lost to view because of the transparency of the skins.

It was Nell who worked most perseveringly, and her little fingers soon became so skilful that she excelled Stasch and Mea. She was quite strong now. The healthy climate of Linde Mountain had completely restored her. The time for the third attack of the deadly fever to make its appearance had passed. On that day Stasch hid himself in the banana thicket and cried for joy. After a stay of two weeks in the mountains he noticed that the "Good Msimu" now looked quite differently than when in the jungle. Her cheeks had be-

come fuller, the former yellow and transparent complexion had disappeared, she looked rosy once more, and from beneath her luxuriant mass of hair her eyes looked out on everything shining with happiness. From the bottom of his heart the boy was thankful for the cool nights, the transparent spring water, the flour from the dried bananas, and above all, Linde.

He had become thin and sunburned, which was a proof that he would not have the fever, for fever patients do not become tanned by the sun. He had grown taller and more manly. His quick movements and the labors he had performed had increased his ability and strength. The muscles of his arms and hands, legs and feet were hard as steel. Now, in fact, he had actually become a seasoned African traveler. As he hunted daily and used bullets only, he had become a sure shot. He no longer feared wild animals, for he knew that the wild and horned hunters were in more danger from him than he was from them. At one shot he had killed a large rhinoceros which unexpectedly attacked him. He never paid the least attention to the numerous African buffaloes, which sometimes disperse whole caravans.

Besides the gluing of the kites and the other daily tasks, Stasch and Nell also set to work to convert Kali, Mea, and Nasibu, and they found this more difficult than they had expected. The black trefoil took great pleasure in being taught, but looked at the lessons from the

negro's point of view. When Stasch told them of the creation of the world, of Paradise, and the serpent, everything went well, but when he got as far as the murder of Abel by Cain, Kali unconsciously patted his stomach and asked with great calmness:

"And did he eat him up then?"

The black boy had always insisted that the Wa-himas never eat human beings, but apparently the remembrance of the days when they did so still remained with him as a national tradition.

Neither could he understand why the Lord God had not killed the "wicked Msimu," and many similar things. His ideas of good and evil were also quite African, which led to the following conversation between teacher and pupil:

"Tell me," asked Stasch, "what is an evil deed?"

"If any one takes cows away from Kali," he answered, after some consideration, "that is an evil deed."

"Excellent!" cried Stasch; "and now give me a good one."

This time he answered at once:

"A good one—for instance—if Kali takes cows away from any one."

Stasch was too young to know that similar ideas of good and evil are prevalent also in Europe, and are practised by politicians and even approved by entire nations.

But gradually light began to dawn in the black brains, and what brains could not understand, warm hearts received. They were shortly ready for Baptism, which was performed with great ceremony. The god-parents presented each of the children with four doti (equal to about sixteen yards) of white percale and a string of blue glass beads. They felt somewhat disappointed, however, for they were so childlike that they thought their skins would turn white immediately after Baptism, and they were greatly surprised when they saw that they were just as black as before. But Nell calmed them by convincing them that they now had white souls.

CHAPTER XV

STASCH also taught Kali how to use the Remington rifle, and this he learned much more easily than the catechism. After ten days' practice shooting at a target and at crocodiles sleeping in the sand on the river banks, the young negro killed a large Pofir-antelope,¹ then several gazels, and finally a Ndiri wild boar. This hunt came near ending in an accident similar to that which had befallen Linde, for the boar,² which Kali had carelessly approached after firing the shot, sprang and flew at him

¹ Bosclapha Canna.

² The wild boars of Africa have a broad head, round, not three-cornered, tusks, and a fairly long tail which they elevate when attacked.

with tail in the air. Kali dropped the gun, took refuge up a tree, and sat there until his screams attracted the attention of Stasch, who found that the wild boar had been slain.

Stasch did not as yet permit the boy to hunt for buffaloes, lions, and rhinoceroses. Stasch would not shoot the elephants which came to the watering-place by night, for he had promised Nell that he would never kill one of them.

But from the mountain-top he would look through the telescope morning and afternoon, and on seeing a herd of zebras, buffaloes, gazels, or deer grazing in the jungle, he would follow them, taking Kali with him. During these excursions he often questioned Kali about the Wa-hima and Samburu tribes that they were bound to meet if they wanted to go east as far as the seacoast.

"Kali, do you know," he once said, "that a journey of twenty days, or if on horseback a journey of only ten days, would enable us to reach your country?"

"Kali not know where Wa-himas live," answered the young negro, shaking his head sadly.

"But I know," said Stasch; "they live where the sun rises over a large stretch of water."

"Yes! yes!" cried the boy joyfully and greatly surprised. "Basso-Narok! (Dark Water.) That is our name for big black water. Great man knows everything!"

"No; I don't know how the Wa-himas would welcome us should we go there."

"Kali order them to fall on their faces before great man and good Msimu."

"And would they obey you?"

"Kali's father wear leopard skin and Kali, too."

Stasch understood that this meant that Kali's father was a king and that he was the eldest son and the future ruler of the Wa-himas. And so he inquired further:

"You told me once that white travelers had visited you and that the older people remember them?"

"Yes; and Kali has heard that they wore a great deal of percale on their heads."

"Ah," thought Stasch to himself, "so they were not Europeans, but Arabs, whom the negroes, judging from the light color of their skins and their white clothes, mistook for white people."

But as Kali remembered nothing about them and could give no further description of them, Stasch put another question to him.

"Did not the Wa-himas kill any of these people dressed in white?"

"No; neither the Wa-himas nor the Sam-burus can do that."

"Why not?"

"Because they said that if the earth sucked up their blood the rain would cease."

"I am glad they think that," thought Stasch. Then he asked:

"Would the Wa-himas go with us as far as the sea, if I were to promise them quantities of percale, glass beads, and weapons?"

"Kali go and also the Wa-himas, but great man must first conquer the Samburus, who are on the other side of the water."

"And who lives back of the Samburus?"

"Back of the Samburus there are no mountains, only a jungle, and in it live lions."

This ended the conversation. Stasch now constantly thought of the great journey to the east, remembering what Linde had said about the possibility of meeting Arabs from the coast, who trade in ivory, and perhaps mission expeditions. He was sure that a journey like this would be very fatiguing and dangerous for Nell, but he knew she could not stay all her life on Linde Mountain, and that they would soon have to move on. The best time to leave is after the rainy season, when the infectious swamps are covered with water and the ground is still damp. On the summit of the mountain they had not as yet felt the heat; the nights were so cool that they had to cover themselves up to sleep. But below, in the jungle, it was now much warmer, and he well knew that it would soon become unbearably hot there. It now rained less and less and the water-line of the river became lower every day; so Stasch conjectured that the river valley would be con-

402 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

verted into a dry bed in summer, the like of which he had formerly seen in the desert of Libya, and that then there would only remain a narrow stream flowing in the middle of its bed.

But he deferred the departure from day to day. On Linde Mountain they all—men as well as animals—felt so much at home! Nell was not only cured of the fever, but also of her anemic condition. Stasch had no more headaches and Kali's and Mea's skin began to shine like black satin. Nasibu looked like a walking melon on thin legs, and King, as well as the horses and the donkey, had become quite fat. Stasch knew very well that they would not find another island like this in the midst of the jungle during their entire journey. He looked into the future with much foreboding, although they now had considerable assistance, and, if need be, an important defender in King.

And so another week passed before they began making preparations for the journey. Whenever they were not busy packing they devoted the time to sending up kites containing the information that they were going in an easterly direction toward a certain lake. They sent them up continually, because a strong west wind was blowing almost a hurricane, which carried them off over the mountains. To protect Nell from the heat Stasch made a palanquin out of the remains of the tent; this was to be placed on the elephant's back, for the

girl to ride in. After it had been put on King a few times he became accustomed to the light weight, and also to having the palanquin bound to his back with palm thongs. But this was a featherweight in comparison to the other baggage he was expected to carry, which Kali and Mea were now busy sorting and packing.

Little Nasibu was told to look for bananas and to rub them to flour between two flat stones. King assisted him in picking the heavy clusters of fruit, but they both ate so much that the bananas in the vicinity of the huts were soon gone, and they were obliged to go to another grove, situated at the opposite end of the plateau. Saba, who had nothing to do, often kept them company on these expeditions.

But Nasibu came near paying for his zeal with his life, or at least a very strange kind of imprisonment. For it happened that once when he was gathering bananas on the edge of a steep, overhanging cliff he suddenly saw in a crevice a horrible face, covered with black skin, with eyes that blinked at him as it laughingly showed its front teeth. At first the boy was nearly petrified with fear—then he began to run for his life. But before he had gone far a hairy arm encircled him; he was lifted into the air, and the night-black monster started off running with him toward a gorge.

Fortunately the enormous monkey could only run on two feet; consequently Saba, who happened to be near, easily overtook it and

404 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

buried his enormous jaws in his back. A terrible fight ensued, in which the dog, notwithstanding his great size and strength, would certainly have been worsted had not succor arrived in time to save him; for a gorilla can even conquer lions, and monkeys seldom let go their prey, even when it is a matter of regaining their freedom or their lives.¹ The gorilla, having been attacked from behind, could not easily get at Saba, but in spite of that he picked him up by the neck with his left hand and was lifting him in the air when the ground shook under a heavy tread, and King came running up.

A slight blow with his trunk was sufficient, and the terrible "forest devil," as the negroes call the gorilla, sank to the ground with brains and neck crushed. But to make sure that the monster was dead, or from his natural antipathy to it, King nailed it to the ground with his tusks and then continued to wreak his vengeance on it until Stasch, who had become alarmed at the roaring and screaming, came running up from the direction of the huts, gun in hand, and ordered him to stop.

The gorilla lay in a pool of blood, which Saba began to lick up, and King's tusks were stained with gore. It was a very large gorilla, and, though dead, its upturned eyes and its

¹ It is true that gorillas live mostly in the forests of western Africa, but Livingstone also met them in the east. They often carry off children. The gorilla of East Africa is less vicious than that of the west, for it does not kill the wounded huntsman, but is satisfied with biting off his fingers.

teeth made it still a horrible looking object. The elephant trumpeted triumphantly, and Nasibu, ash-gray with terror, told Stasch what had happened. For a moment he considered whether he should fetch Nell and show her the horrible monkey, but he dismissed the thought, for suddenly a great fear took possession of him. Nell often went out walking alone on the island, and might not the very same thing happen to her?

This proved that Linde Mountain was not such a safe refuge as it at first seemed. Stasch returned to the hut and told Nell what had happened; she listened in curiosity and fright, her eyes wide open, continually repeating:

"You see what would have happened without King?"

"That's right! One need not worry about a child with a nurse like him; so while we are here don't take a step away without him."

"And when are we going to leave?"

"The provisions are ready, the baggage sorted, and there is nothing to do but pack the loads on the animals; and so we can start tomorrow."

"To see our papas?"

"If it be God's will!" answered Stasch gravely.

CHAPTER XVI

THEY did not break up camp until several days later. They departed at dawn—six o'clock—after a short prayer, in which they earnestly commended themselves to God. At their head rode Stasch on horseback, preceded by Saba. Behind him solemnly marched King, flapping his ears and carrying on his enormous back the palanquin in which Nell and Mea were seated; then, under Kali's guidance, followed the horses, tied together with a long rope, and laden with all sorts of baggage; and little Nasibu, on the donkey—which was as fat as the boy—brought up the rear.

At that early hour the heat did not inconvenience them very much, although the day was fine, and from behind the Karamajo Mountains the sun rose in great splendor from a cloudless sky. An eastern breeze mitigated the heat of its rays. Occasionally the wind blew a gale, waving the jungle grass like billows of the sea. Vegetation had grown so luxuriantly after the copious showers—especially at the lower levels—that King and the horses were covered up by the grass, so that all that could be seen above the waving jungle was the white palanquin, which looked like a ship sailing on a lake. After marching for an hour they came to a dry, high plateau lying to the east of Linde Mountain, and saw enormous thistles,¹

¹ *Eschinops giganteus* grows in this country and is especially abundant in Abyssinia.

THROUGH THE DESERT 407

with stems as thick as tree trunks and flowers as large as human heads. On the slope of many plateaus, which from a distance looked barren, they found heather eight feet high. Other plants, that grow very small in Europe, flourished here large as the thistles and heather, and giant trees, standing by themselves in the jungle, looked like church towers. Especially that species of fig-tree known as the "daroo-tree," whose "weeping" branches turn into new stems on touching the ground, covered enormous areas, so that each tree made a wilderness in itself.

From afar off the country appeared like one unbroken forest; but when nearer it could be seen that the large trees grew only in certain places—at various distances apart. Toward the north very few of them could be seen, and the country seemed more like a mountainous steppe covered with an even jungle, out of which the umbrella-shaped acacias alone towered. The grasses there were greener, smaller, and apparently better suited for grazing. Nell from her high seat on King's back and Stasch from a hillock saw larger herds of antelope than they had ever seen before. The animals of each species grazed by themselves, or occasionally intermingled with the gnu, boar, gazel, Ariel, female antelope, buffalo, spring-buck, large koodoo, and others. There were a great many zebras and giraffes to be seen. On observing the caravan in the grass

the animals stood still, threw up their heads, pricked up their ears, and looked at the white palanquin in surprise; then they immediately dispersed and ran away for a few hundred feet, then stared again at the strange apparition, until they had satisfied their curiosity, and calmly began to graze again. From time to time there appeared in front of the caravan a rhinoceros growling and snarling, but notwithstanding its aggressive nature and its disposition to attack everything that comes in its way, it fled ignominiously before the glance of King, who was only kept from following it by a command from Stasch.

The African elephant hates the rhinoceros, and if he comes across a fresh trail he follows it up till he finds his adversary, and, relying on his superior strength, begins the fight in which the rhinoceros is nearly always worsted. It was not very easy for King, who certainly had more than one death on his conscience, to renounce his old habit, but he was now tame and accustomed to look upon Stasch as his master; therefore, on hearing his voice, and seeing his bright and threatening eyes, the beast dropped his upturned trunk, drew in his ears, and calmly walked on. Though Stasch would have enjoyed seeing a fight between these giants, he was afraid of its effect on Nell. If the elephant were to gallop, the palanquin might fall to pieces, or, what would be worse, the enormous animal might knock it against a

tree; so Nell's life would be in great danger. From the tales of the chase which Stasch had read when at Port Said he learned that in India people hunting tigers are more afraid that the elephant, in the excitement of the chase, might knock the small tower against a tree than they are even of the tigers. Besides, the giant gallops so clumsily that to ride like that any length of time would endanger one's health.

On the other hand, the presence of King obviated many dangers. The vicious buffaloes they met that day on their way to the small lake, where all the animals in the neighborhood congregated at nightfall, also fled when he looked at them, and ran to the other side of the lake to drink. With his left foot tied to a tree, King guarded the tent in which Nell slept, and this so thoroughly protected her that although Stasch kept a fire burning, he thought it unnecessary to build a hedge around the camp, although he knew that there must certainly be lions in the vicinity of so many herds of antelope; in fact, some of them began to roar that very night among the enormous juniper-trees¹ on the mountain slope. Attracted by the scent of the horses, they approached the camp, notwithstanding the burning fire, but when King could no longer stand their constant roaring, and began to send forth his threatening, thunder-like trumpeting, they quieted down

¹ In Abyssinia in the Karamajo Mountains, the juniper trees attain a height of fifty feet.

410 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

humbly, for they seemed to know that they had better not come in contact with such an antagonist. After this the children slept soundly for the remainder of the night, and they did not continue their journey until day-break.

But now Stasch was to have new troubles and worries. He noticed that they were traveling very slowly and that they could not cover more than ten kilometers a day. If they progressed no faster than that they would certainly not reach the borders of Abyssinia in a month, but as Stasch had decided to follow Linde's advice implicitly (he had distinctly said that they would not be able to reach Abyssinia), the road to the ocean was the only one that they could take. But according to the calculation made by the Swiss, more than a thousand kilometers lay between them and the ocean; that is, in a direct line; for by way of Mombasa, which lies in a more southerly direction, it is farther away, and it would take more than three months to make the journey. Stasch was terrified when he thought that this meant three months of fatigue, excitement, and danger from encounters with tribes of negroes. Now they were still in a barren country, depopulated by smallpox and rumors of attacks by the Dervishes; but as, on the whole, Africa is fairly well populated, sooner or later they were bound to come to places inhabited by strange tribes, which would probably be ruled by savage and

treacherous chiefs. It was no easy task to retain one's freedom and one's life amid such dangers.

Therefore Stasch calculated that if they could come across the Wa-hima tribe he would teach several of the warriors how to shoot, and by making great promises would induce them to accompany their party to the ocean. But Kali had not the least idea where his tribe lived, and Linde, who had heard something about them, could neither tell how to reach them, nor could he give an exact description of the place where they lived. Linde had also mentioned having heard about a large lake, and Kali distinctly declared the Wa-hima live on one side of this lake, which he called Basso-Narok, on the other side of which the Samburu live. But now Stasch was worried because that lake was not mentioned in the geography of Africa, which he had studied carefully at school in Port Said. If Kali had been the only one to mention it Stasch would have supposed it to be Victoria-Nyanza, but Linde could not have made a mistake like that if he had marched from Victoria Lake northward along the Karamajo Mountains. Stasch came to the conclusion, after questioning the inhabitants of these mountains, that this mysterious lake ought to lie further to the east and north. Stasch did not know what to think of all this; he was also afraid he might miss the lake and come across the Wa-himas or other savage

412 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

tribes, arid jungles, impassable mountains, the tsetse-flies, which might kill the animals, the sleeping-sickness, the fever for Nell, the heat, and worst of all those interminable distances which still separated them from the ocean.

But having left Linde Mountain, the only thing to do was to advance steadily due east. Linde had said that this was a journey to tax the strength of an experienced and energetic explorer to the utmost, but Stasch had already had great experience, and for Nell's sake he determined not to think of himself and to spare no energy to accomplish his purpose. For the present it was necessary to save the girl's strength, and so he decided to travel only between six and ten o'clock in the morning, and from three to six o'clock in the evening, when there happened to be no water at their first halting-place. However, as there had been plenty of rain during the rainy season, they found water everywhere. The small lakes formed on the lowlands by the showers were still well filled, and here and there rivers of crystal-clear cold water flowed from the mountains; these were very inviting to bathe in, and also very safe, for crocodiles only live in larger streams where there are plenty of fish, upon which they chiefly subsist. As Stasch had found a very good filter among Linde's things, he did not allow the girl to drink unfiltered water. The filter always surprised Kali and Mea, for they saw that, though filled with

clouded and whitish water, only clean and clear water flowed from it into the reservoir beneath. At this they laughed and slapped their knees, to show their pleasure and surprise.

On the whole the beginning of their journey was made by easy stages. They had received from Linde large supplies of coffee, tea, sugar, bouillon, various canned goods, and all kinds of medicines. Stasch was not sparing of these, for they had more than they could take with them. They also had plenty of utensils of all kinds, weapons of various caliber, and rockets, which would be of great service when meeting negroes. The country was very fertile, and there was plenty of fruit and fresh meat. In the lowlands they occasionally came across swamps, which had not evaporated sufficiently to poison the air with their deadly odors, being still covered over with water. At this height there were no mosquitoes to inoculate one with the fever; still, the altitude did not prevent it from becoming unbearably hot by ten o'clock. The small travelers made a halt during the so-called "white hours" in the deep shade of large trees, through the thick foliage of which not a ray of sun could penetrate. And so Nell, Stasch, and the negroes kept in excellent health.

CHAPTER XVII

ON THE fifth day of their journey Stasch rode with Nell on King, for they had come to a broad belt of acacias, which were so thick that the horses had to follow in the path made by the elephant. It was now early in the morning, and the landscape was glistening, fresh with dew. The children talked about the journey, and how every day was bringing them nearer to their fathers, for both children had never ceased to long for them since they were taken from Fayoum; their conversation centered around this subject, and they always ended by weeping. They repeated over and over again the same thoughts: their fathers think that they are now dead, or that they have disappeared never to return; both are grieving, and, although hope is well nigh dead, they send Arabians to Khartum to try to get news of them, and all this time they are not only far away from Khartum, but also from Fashoda—in five days they will be even further off—then further and further still, and at last they will reach the ocean, or perhaps before they come to the sea they may reach a place where they can send a telegram. The only person in the caravan who knew what they had before them was Stasch, while Nell was positively convinced that there was nothing in the world that he could not achieve, and she was quite sure that he would bring her to the coast. So

she anticipated events, and planned in her little head more than once what would happen when the first news of them should be received. Chirping like a little bird, she told Stasch about it. "Our papas," she said, "are sitting in Port Said, and they are weeping; then suddenly a boy comes in with a telegram. What's that? Either your papa or mine opens it, looks at the signature and reads: 'Stasch and Nell!' How happy they are! They will make all haste to meet us! There will be joy in the whole house! Our papas and every one in the house will be happy—they will be delighted and will immediately come driving up. I shall fall on papa's neck; then we shall always be together, and——"

And the tale ended with Nell's chin beginning to tremble, her beautiful eyes turning into two fountains, and finally by leaning her little head on Stasch's shoulder and crying for sorrow, longing, and joy at the thought of the future meeting. Stasch rather imagined that his father would be proud of him and would say to him: "You have acted like a true Pole," and he was then overcome by emotion, great longing, and enthusiasm, and an immovable courage, hard as steel, took possession of his heart. "I *must*," he said to himself in these moments, "save Nell. I *must* go through these trials." Then it seemed to him that there were no dangers he could not face, no obstacles he could not overcome.

416 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

But the final victory was far off yet. They worked their way through the grove of acacias, the long thorns of the bushes tearing even the hide of the elephant. Eventually more light penetrated the forest, and through the branches of the scattered trees a gray jungle could be seen in the distance. Although the heat was very oppressive, Stasch climbed out of the palanquin, settled himself on King's neck, and looked around in search of herds of antelope or zebras, for he determined to provide more meat for them to eat.

To the right he saw two gazels and beyond them two ostriches. On passing the last group of trees the elephant turned off to the left, and then a different sight presented itself to the boy. Half a kilometer away he saw a very large field of manioc, and on the edge of the field several black people, apparently busy working.

"Negroes!" he cried out, turning to Nell.

His heart began to beat violently. For a moment he hesitated whether he should not return and hide in the acacias, but it occurred to him that in an inhabited district one must sooner or later be obliged to meet its inhabitants and have relations with them, and that the fate of their journey would depend on the nature of these relations; so after quick reflection he guided the elephant toward the field.

At the same moment Kali also appeared, and pointing to the group of trees, said:

"Great Man, over there is a negro village,

and women are working in the manioc fields. Shall I ride to them?"

"We will ride there together," answered Stasch, "and then you will tell them that we come as friends."

"Sir, I know what to say to them," cried the young negro, feeling his great importance.

Turning his horse toward the workers, he placed his hands trumpet-like to his mouth and cried:

"Jambo he! Jambo sana!"

When the women, who were very busy digging up the manioc roots, heard his voice, they sprang up and stood as if rooted to the spot; but this quiet only lasted a moment, for they began to scream and run off toward the trees, in the midst of which the village lay, in their excitement leaving their hoes and rakes behind them.

The small wanderers approached this village slowly and silently. The thicket resounded with the howling of several hundred voices; then silence reigned. At last the hollow, penetrating beating of a drum was heard, which continued incessantly for some time.

This was evidently to call the warriors to war, for suddenly more than three hundred of them appeared from out of the bushes, and they all stood in one long line before the village. When a hundred feet distant Stasch brought King to a standstill and began to look at them. The sun beat down on their well-formed bodies,

418 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

on their broad chests, and their strong shoulders. They were armed with bows and spears. Around their hips they wore short skirts of heather or monkey skin. Their heads were adorned with ostrich and parrot feathers or large wigs made of baboons' scalps. They looked warlike and menacing, but stood silent and immovable, for they were so utterly astonished that their inclination to fight was kept within bounds. All eyes were fixed on King, on the white palanquin, and on the white person sitting on the neck of the elephant.

And yet elephants were not strangers to them. On the contrary, they were continually at the mercy of elephants, for at night whole herds would destroy their manioc fields and their plantations of bananas and palms. As spears and arrows can not pierce an elephant's hide, the poor negroes fought against the mischief-makers by means of fire and screams, in which they imitated the crowing of cocks, and they dug out trenches and made traps with tree trunks. But they had never seen an elephant made the slave of man and allowing him to sit on its neck; and none of them was able to account for this extraordinary sight. What they saw so transcended their wildest imaginations that they did not know what course to pursue—whether to fight or to run away as fast as their feet could carry them and leave the rest to chance. Full of doubt, fear, and surprise, they continually whispered to one another:

"Oh, mother! What are these beings who come here to us, and how will they be disposed toward us?"

Kali, who had ridden up to within a spear's throw of them, raised himself up in his stirrups and cried:

"People, people! Listen to the voice of Kali, the son of Fumba, the powerful king of the Wa-himas, who live on the banks of the Basso-Narok— Oh, hear, hear!— And if you understand him, listen to every word he is going to say!"

"We understand," rang the answer from three hundred throats.

"Let your king advance, let him tell me his name, and let him open his ears and lips so that he can hear better."

"M'Rua! M'Rua!" many voices began to cry out.

M'Rua stepped out of the rank and file, but took only three steps forward. He was an aged negro, tall and strongly built, but who evidently had no courage to spare, for his legs trembled so that he had to dig the point of his spear into the ground and to lean on its hilt to keep from falling.

Other warriors followed his example, and dug their spears into the ground, as a sign that they wished to listen peacefully to the tidings of the stranger.

Thereupon Kali declaimed at the top of his voice:

"M'Rua, and you, M'Rua's people! You have heard that the son of the king of the Wa-himas is talking to you, whose cows cover the mountains around the Basso-Narok as ants cover the carcass of a dead giraffe. And what is Kali, the son of the king of the Wa-himas, saying? He is telling you a great piece of good news, which is that the 'good Msimu' has come to your village!"

Then he cried still louder:

"So it is—the good Msimu! Doo!"

From the silence that ensued one could readily guess what a tremendous effect Kali's words had aroused. The warriors began to separate and then to form in groups; some advanced a few steps through curiosity, whilst others drew back through fear. M'Rua leaned with both hands on his spear, and for a short time perfect silence ensued, followed by a slight whispering through the ranks, and one voice at a time repeated:

"Msimu! Msimu!" and here and there the cries: "Yancig! Yancig!" which expressed admiration and welcome, were to be heard.

But Kali's voice rose again above the noises and screams.

"Gaze and be happy! The good Msimu is sitting over there in the white hut on the back of the large elephant, and the large elephant obeys it like a slave obeys his master and a child obeys his mother. Oh, neither you nor your fathers have ever seen anything like this——"

"No, no! We have never seen anything like this! Yancig! Yancig!"

The eyes of all the warriors turned to the "hut," in other words, to the palanquin.

And Kali, who in the course of the religious training he had received on Linde Mountain had been told that faith can move mountains, was quite convinced that the prayer of the white "Bibi" was all powerful with God, and so he continued to speak, as he thought truthfully, about the good Msimu.

"Listen! Listen! The good Msimu is riding on the elephant to that country in which the sun rises out of the water behind the mountains. There the good Msimu will tell the Great Spirit to send you clouds, and these clouds will, in seasons of drought, water your millet, your manioc, your bananas, and the grass in the jungle, so that you will have plenty to eat, and your cows will have good fodder and will give rich milk. Do you, oh people, need food and milk?"

"He! We need it! We need it!"

"And the good Msimu will tell the Great Spirit to send you a wind which will blow away from your village that sickness which honeycombs the body. Do you, oh people, want it to blow the sickness away?"

"He! Let it blow it away!"

"And at the prayer of the good Msimu the Great Spirit will protect you from attacks, from slavery, from damage to your fields, from

422 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

lions, from pānthers, from snakes and from locusts——”

“He! Let him do it!”

“Now listen, look and see who sits in front of the hut between the ears of the terrible elephant. There is Bwana Kubwa, the white man, great and strong, whom even the elephant fears.”

“He!”

“Who has thunder in his hands and uses it to kill bad men.”

“He!”

“Who kills lions.”

“He!”

“Who sends up fiery snakes!”

“He!”

“Who breaks rocks!”

“He!”

“But who will do you no harm if you will respect the good Msimu!”

“Yancig! Yancig!”

“And if you will bring him dried banana flour, eggs, fresh milk, and honey.”

“Yancig! Yancig!”

“Then come nearer and fall on your faces before the good Msimu.”

M’Rua and his warriors started off, repeating continuously, “Yancig! Yancig!” Then approaching cautiously, they moved a short distance nearer, for their steps were halted by their superstitious fear of the Msimu and the elephant. The sight of Saba also filled them with

terror, for they took him to be a "wobo," a large golden leopard, inhabiting that district and also southern Abyssinia, which the natives fear more than a lion because it is especially fond of human flesh, and is even bold enough to attack armed men. But they were pacified on seeing that the little fat-faced negro held the terrible "wobo" by a leash. This gave them a still higher conception of the power of the good Msimu, and also of the white man, and while looking first at the white elephant, then at Saba, they whispered to each other: "If they have even bewitched wobo, who in the world can struggle successfully against them?" But the most solemn moment was when Stasch, turning to Nell, bowed low and then pushed back the sides of the palanquin, which were arranged like curtains, and showed the good Msimu to the assembled multitude. M'Rua and every one of the warriors fell on their faces, so that their bodies formed a long, living bridge. None dared to move, and all hearts were even more terror-stricken when just at that very moment King, either by order of Stasch or of his own accord, threw up his trunk and began to trumpet very loud, and Saba followed his example in the deepest bass which he could muster. Then there rang out from the hearts of all the warriors a cry like a beseeching groaning: "Aka! Aka! Aka!" and this lasted a long while, until Kali continued:

"Oh, M'Rua and you children of M'Rua!

424 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

You have now done reverence before the good Msimu; so arise and fill your eyes with the sight of it, for whoever does this, over him will be the blessing of the Great Spirit. Banish all fear from your hearts, and know that where the good Msimu is, human blood can not be shed."

At these words, and especially after the explanation that on account of the good Msimu none could be carried away by death, M'Rua stood up, and the other warriors followed his example, and they began shyly, but also with great curiosity, to gaze at the gracious godhead. If Kali had asked them a second time, they would certainly have had to confess that neither their fathers nor they had ever seen anything like this. For their eyes were accustomed to mask-like, grotesque figures of idols, made out of wood and hairy cocoanuts, and now there stood before them on the back of the elephant a blonde, gentle, sweet, and smiling godhead, resembling a white bird and a white flower, and so they gained confidence; their hearts breathed freely once more, their thick lips began to smile, and unconsciously stretching their hands out toward the wonderful apparition, they cried: "Oh, Yancig! Yancig! Yancig!"

But Stasch, who noticed everything that was going on, perceived as soon as Kali stopped speaking that a negro, adorned with a pointed cap of ratskin, had slipped out of line, and, gliding along in the grass like a snake, had

gone in the direction of a solitary hut lying at the rear of the enclosure, which was surrounded by a high railing held together by creepers.

Meanwhile the good Msimu, though greatly embarrassed by being set up as a godhead, put out her little hand at Stasch's request and greeted the negroes. The black warriors, their eyes shining with pleasure, followed every movement of this little hand, believing that it possessed a powerful charm, which would protect them against many misfortunes. Some, whilst striking their cheeks and hips, said: "Oh, mother! Now everything will go well with us—with us and with our cows!" M'Rua, who had already become quite familiar, approached the elephant, prostrated himself, striking the ground with his forehead, before the good Msimu, and whilst kneeling said to Stasch:

"Would the Great Man, who leads the white godhead on the elephant, like to eat a piece of M'Rua and would he agree to let M'Rua eat a piece of him, so that we shall be brothers, between whom there is no deceit or treason?"

Kali immediately interpreted these words, but as he saw by Stasch's face that the latter had no inclination to taste a "piece" of M'Rua, he turned to the negro and said:

"Oh, M'Rua! Do you really think that the white man, who is so powerful that the elephant fears him, who has the thunder within his grasp, who kills lions, before whom wobo

426 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

wags his tail, who commands fiery snakes to rise up into the sky, and who shatters rocks—do you think that he can pledge blood brotherhood with any king he may happen to meet? But rather think whether the Great Spirit will not punish you for being so presumptuous and whether it will not be honor enough for you to eat a piece of Kali, the son of Fumba, the ruler of the Wa-hima, and Kali, son of Fumba, to eat a piece of you.”

“Are you his slave?” asked M’Rua.

“The Great Man neither stole nor bought Kali, but only saved his life; that is why Kali leads the good Msimu and the man into the land of the Wa-hima, so that the Wa-hima and Fumba can show them respect and bring them many presents.”

“Let it be as you say, and M’Rua shall eat a piece of Kali, and Kali a piece of M’Rua!”

“So let it be!” repeated the warriors.

“Where is the sorcerer?” asked the king.

“Where is the sorcerer? Where is the sorcerer? Where is Kamba?” at once cried many voices.

Then something happened that might have completely changed the situation, clouded the friendly relations, and converted the negroes into the enemies of their newly arrived guests. From the hut which stood apart, surrounded by a special fence, there suddenly came an infernal noise. It was like the roar of a lion, the clap of thunder, the blast of trumpets, the laugh of

a hyena, the howl of a wolf, and the terrible squeak of rusty hinges. When King heard these awful sounds he began to roar, Saba began to bark, and the donkey, on which Nasibu sat, to cry out "J-a!" The warriors sprang up as if drenched with boiling water and tore their spears out of the ground. Terrible confusion ensued. The disturbing cries of "Our Msimu! Our Msimu!" reached Stasch's ears, and the respect and good-will with which the negroes had looked upon the newcomers disappeared in an instant. The savages began to throw suspicious and hostile glances around. Amongst the crowd a threatening noise was heard and the awful din in the lonely hut increased more and more.

Kali was troubled, and bending over quickly to Stasch, he began to whisper—his voice filled with emotion and fright:

"Sir, the sorcerer has awakened the bad Msimu, who fears that he will not receive any presents, and is roaring with rage. Sir, pacify the sorcerer and the bad Msimu with generous gifts—otherwise these people will turn against us."

"Pacify them!" cried Stasch.

He suddenly became enraged against the wickedness and covetousness of the sorcerer. He was also greatly alarmed at this unlooked-for danger. The expression of his tanned face changed, just as it had done when he shot down Gebhr, Chamis, and the two Bedouins. His

428 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

eyes shone threateningly and he bit his lips, clenched his fists, and his cheeks grew pale.

"Ah! I will soon pacify them!" he said.

Without wasting any time, he led the elephant toward the hut.

Kali, who was afraid to remain alone among the negroes, followed him. Then rose from the warriors a loud cry, whether of fear or rage it was hard to tell, but before they could regain their composure the railing creaked and broke down under the shock of the elephant's head, the clay walls of the hut fell apart, the roof caved in, a cloud of ruins and dust flew into the air, and after a while M'Rua and his people saw the long, black, upturned trunk on the end of which was the sorcerer, Kamba.

Stasch, who saw on the floor of the hut a large drum made out of a hollowed-out tree, and covered with a monkey-skin, made Kali give it to him, and turning around, he stood facing the warriors, looking straight into their eyes:

"Hear, O people!" he said in a loud, resounding voice; "it was not your Msimu who roared, but only that villain there, who pounds the drum to wring presents from you, and you are as afraid of him as children!"

At these words he took hold of the string which was drawn through the dried skin of the drum and began to pull at it and twist it with all his might. The same sounds which had terrified the negroes before now rang out

again, only much louder, for the walls of the hut did not smother them.

"Oh, how foolish are M'Rua and his children!" cried Kali.

Stasch handed him the drum, and Kali beat so frantically that for a while one could not hear one's self talk. When he tired of this he threw the drum at M'Rua's feet, and 'mid shrieks of laughter said:

"That thing is your Msimu!"

Then, chattering, after the custom of negroes, he addressed the warriors, and was by no means sparing in expressing his contempt for them and for M'Rua, and in holding them up to ridicule. He pointed to Kamba and explained to them that "this thief in the rat-skin cap" had deceived them for many a rainy and dry season, and that they had rewarded him by feeding him with beans, young goats, and honey. Is it possible that there could be a more stupid king and a more stupid people than these? They believed in the power of an old witch and in his witchcraft, and now they see how this great sorcerer hangs from the trunk of an elephant and cries "Aka!" begging mercy of the white man. Where is his power now? Where is his witchcraft? Why does Msimu not roar to protect him? Ah, what sort of thing is your Msimu? A strip of monkey skin and a piece of a rotten tree-trunk, which the elephant has destroyed. Neither the women nor the children of the Wa-

480 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

himas would have been afraid of such a Msimu, and M'Rua and his men were afraid of it! There is only one real Msimu and one really great and powerful man, and to him they ought to show respect and bring as many presents as they can, for otherwise they will be afflicted with misfortunes such as they had never dreamed of.

This harangue to the negroes was quite unnecessary, for the sorcerer with his wicked Msimu had proved himself to be weaker than the new god in such an extraordinary manner, and Stasch satisfied them so well, that they forswore their allegiance to the sorcerer and covered him with shame. Again they cried out, "Yancig!" even more humbly and earnestly than before. They were so angry now with themselves for having been deceived by Kamba during many years that they insisted on killing him. M'Rua begged Stasch to let them bind him and keep him until they had invented a death of dreadful torture for him. But Nell decided to spare his life, and as Kali had told them that no human blood could be shed in presence of the good Msimu, Stasch only permitted them to drive the unhappy sorcerer from the village with shame and ignominy.

Kamba, who feared he would be put to death by their cleverly devised tortures, fell on his face before the good Msimu, and weeping bitterly, thanked her for his deliverance. From this time forth there was nothing to mar the

awe they inspired. Women and children now came from behind the fence, for the news of the extraordinary guest had already spread throughout the entire village, and the desire to see the white Msimu was greater than their fear of her. For the first time in their lives Stasch and Nell saw a settlement of real savages, who had never been visited even by Arabs. The clothing of these negroes consisted only of heather aprons or of a skin wound around the hips, and every one was tattooed. The men as well as the women had their ears pierced, and through these holes they had thrust such long pieces of wood or bone that the lobes of their ears were drawn down to their shoulders. In their lower lips they wore a lip-ring, a round piece of wood or bone the size of a saucer. Those of highest rank, such as warriors and their wives, wore around their necks steel or brass wire collars, so high and stiff that they could scarcely turn their heads.

They evidently belonged to the Schilluk tribe, which reached far toward the east, for Kali and Mea knew their language well, and Stasch could understand some things they said. Their legs were not so long as those of their compatriots who live in the district of the Nile; they were of shorter stature, their shoulders were broader, and they looked less like wattle-birds. The children resembled large fleas, and not being disfigured by the pelele, they were

482 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

decidedly better looking than the grown people.

After the women had stared long enough at the good Msimu from a distance, they vied with the warriors in bringing presents, young goats, fowls, eggs, black beans, and beer made from millet. This lasted until Stasch forbade them to bring any more. He paid them generously with glass beads and colored percale, and Nell distributed tiny mirrors among the children; and so there was great rejoicing throughout the village and joyful cries resounded about the tent occupied by the little travelers. Then the warriors held a war-dance and a skilfully devised sham battle in honor of the guests, after which one of the warriors suggested the cementing of a bond of fellowship between Kali and M'Rua.

As Kamba, who was usually one of the principal figures in such a ceremony, had gone off, an old negro who was very familiar with the formula took his place. After he had killed a young goat, removed the liver and divided it in several large pieces, he began to twirl around on hands and feet like a fly-wheel, and looking first at Kali, then at M'Rua, said in a solemn voice:

"Kali, the son of Fumba, will you eat a piece of M'Rua, the son of M'Kuli—and you, M'Rua, son of M'Kuli, will you eat a piece of Kali, the son of Fumba?"

"We will!" cried the future brothers.



“The People saw the long, black trunk, on the end of which was the sorcerer, Kamba.”—PAGE 428.

"Do you wish that Kali's heart should be M'Rua's heart, and M'Rua's heart should be Kali's heart?"

"We wish it!"

"And the hands, the spears, and the cows?"

"And the cows!"

"And everything which either one possesses now or will possess?"

"Whatever he possesses and will possess!"

"And that between you there shall be neither falsehood, treason, nor hate?"

"Nor hate!"

"And that neither of you shall rob the other?"

"Never!"

"And that you are brothers?"

"Yes!"

The man who was whizzing around like a top turned quicker and quicker. The warriors assembled and followed his movements with ever-increasing interest.

"Ao!" cried the old negro once more; **"but if one of you lie to the other, betray him, rob him, poison him, or kill him, he shall be accursed!"**

"He shall be accursed!" repeated all the warriors.

"And if he be a liar and contemplate treason, he shall not swallow the blood of his brother, but spit it out before our eyes?"

"Oh, before our eyes!"

"And he shall die!"

"He shall die!"

"Wobo shall tear him to pieces!"

"Wobo!"

"Or a lion!"

"Or a lion!"

"An elephant shall tread him down; yes, and a rhinoceros and buffalo!"

"Oh, and a buffalo!" repeated the chorus.

"And a snake shall bite him!"

"A snake!"

"And his tongue shall turn black!"

"Black!"

"And his eyes shall drop out of his head!"

"Out of his head!"

"And he shall walk with his heels in the air!"

"Ha! with his heels in the air."

Stasch and Kali had to bite their lips to keep from laughing while still more terrible oaths were being repeated, and the "top" turned around so fast that their eyes could not follow its movements. The old negro kept this up until his strength was exhausted and his breath gave out. Then he sat down on the ground a while and swayed his head from side to side. Soon he arose, and grasping a knife, cut Kali's arm and moistening a piece of the goat's liver with his blood, pushed it into M'Rua's mouth, and a second piece moistened with the blood of the king he pushed into Kali's mouth. Both men swallowed the pieces so quickly that a rattling noise could be heard in their throats and their eyes nearly started out of their heads;

then they held each other by the hand, as a sign of true and eternal friendship.

Then the warriors exclaimed joyfully:

"Both men have swallowed it! Neither of them spit it out! Therefore they are sincere and there is no treachery between them."

And in his heart Stasch thanked Kali for having represented him at this ceremony, for he felt that had he attempted to swallow a piece of M'Rua he might have proved himself insincere and a traitor.

Henceforth the little travelers were in no danger of having snares laid for them or of being unexpectedly attacked by the savages; on the contrary, the greatest friendship was shown them, and they were almost worshiped as gods. This worship increased when Stasch, having noticed a great fall in Linde's barometer, foretold that rain was coming, and on that very day it rained quite heavily, as heavily as if the "massika," which was already over, was trying to squeeze out its last drops on the earth. The negroes were convinced that the good Msimu had given them this shower of rain, and their gratitude to Nell was boundless. Stasch teased her, saying that now she was the idol of the negroes, he could continue the journey alone, and would leave her behind in the negro village, where the negroes would erect a small chapel of elephants' tusks for her and would bring her beans and bananas as peace offerings.

But Nell felt so sure of his attachment to her

that she simply reached up on her tip-toes and whispered in his ear: "You will not leave me behind!" Then she began to hop with joy, declaring that as the negroes were so kind the journey to the ocean could be readily and quickly made. All this took place in front of the tent before the assembled multitude, and when old M'Rua saw the Msimu happy, he also began to hop as high as his crooked legs would let him, believing that in this way he was demonstrating his piety. Following his example, the chief officers began to dance, and so did the warriors, the women, and children, and in fact all the inhabitants of the village hopped about as though bereft of their senses. This exhibition given by the "idol" amused Stasch so much that he laughed himself almost sick.

On the following night he earned the everlasting gratitude of the pious king and his subjects, for when some elephants raided the banana-fields, he rode toward them on King and set off several rockets into their midst. The panic which the fiery "snakes" created was even greater than he had expected. The enormous animals, dreadfully frightened, filled the whole jungle with the sound of their trumpeting and their stamping, and in blind haste they knocked one another down. The powerful King took great pleasure in following his fleeing comrades, and struck at them unsparingly with his trunk and tusks. After such a night it would be a long time before another elephant would

dare approach the banana plantations of the village ruled over by old M'Rua.

The dispersal of the elephants was followed by great rejoicing in the village, and the negroes spent the whole night dancing and drinking millet-beer and palm-wine. Kali then learned many important things from them, for it so happened that several of them had come from the borders of a large sheet of water surrounded by mountains and lying toward the east. This proved to Stasch that the lake, which he had never seen mentioned in any geography, really existed, and that if they continued in the same direction they would meet the Wa-himas. From the fact that Mea and Kali spoke almost the same language, he argued that "Wa-hima" was probably a local name, and that the tribes living on the banks of the Basso-Narok belonged to the Schilluks, whose country extended from the Nile far away toward the east. At the time of the Mahdi these places were still unexplored.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE whole population escorted the good Msimu quite a distance, and took leave of her with tears in their eyes, at the same time earnestly begging her to condescend to visit M'Rua once again and occasionally to think of his people. Stasch considered a moment whether he should tell the negroes about the

438 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

gorge where he had hidden the goods and provisions left him by Linde, which—on account of the lack of baggage-carriers—he could not take with him, but when he realized that the possession of such riches might awaken their covetousness, cause them to be jealous, disturb the tranquillity of their lives, and set them to fighting, he dismissed this idea; but he shot a large buffalo and left them its carcass for a parting feast. The sight of such a quantity of “Nyama” satisfied them.

The next three days the caravan went through a barren stretch of land. The days were hot, but the nights, on account of the altitude, were so cold that Stasch found it necessary to have Nell covered up with two rugs. They now often passed over narrow mountain passes, sometimes barren and hilly, sometimes covered with such thick vegetation that they had difficulty in winding their way through them. On the edges of these ravines they saw large monkeys, and here and there also lions and panthers, which had taken refuge in the rocky caves. At Kali's request Stasch killed one of the animals, and then Kali put on its skin to impress the negroes with the fact that they had to reckon with a person of kingly blood.

On a tableland beyond the narrow passes negro hamlets again appeared. Sometimes they were in groups, sometimes one or two days' journey apart. As a protection against

lions all the huts were surrounded by high fences, so interwoven and overrun with vines that even at a short distance they appeared like the undergrowth of a forest. The smoke rising from the center of the huts was the only indication that they were inhabited. The caravan was as welcome everywhere as it had been in M'Rua's village, first exciting fear and mistrust, and then surprise, admiration, and respect. Only on one occasion did the sight of the elephant, Saba, the horses and the white people cause an entire village to flee to the neighboring forest, and therefore the travelers had no chance of making themselves known. But not a single spear was raised against them, for if the hearts of the negroes are not filled by Mohammedanism with hatred and treachery against unbelievers, they are apt to be timid and peaceful. The travelers were welcomed so heartily that Kali had to eat a piece of the village king and the latter a piece of Kali, whereupon the most friendly relations were consummated. To the good Msimu they did homage and showed their reverence by offering fowls, eggs, and honey, brought from hollow blocks of wood, which had been fastened in the branches of a large tree by means of palm threads. The "Great Man," the ruler of the elephant, the thunder, and the fiery serpent, aroused general terror, which soon gave place to gratitude when they were convinced that he was as generous as he was powerful. In places

440 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

where the small villages were numerous the news of the arrival of these extraordinary guests would be communicated to the next settlement by drum signals, for the negroes announce everything by beating the drum. Sometimes the whole population advanced to meet them with friendly greetings.

In one village of nearly a thousand inhabitants the potentate, who was at the same time sorcerer and king, expressed his willingness to show them the great "fetish," which was so much revered and dreaded that the people did not dare to approach the ebony chapel covered with rhinoceros hide, and so they placed their offerings fifty feet distant. The king told Stasch and Nell that this fetish had lately fallen from the moon, that it was white and had a tail. Stasch immediately explained that the moon had sent it down at the request of the good Msimu, and in thus speaking he did not deviate from the truth, for it turned out that the "great fetish" was simply one of the kites which he had sent up from Linde Mountain. He and Nell felt very happy when they thought the same wind might have carried the others still farther, and he decided to continue sending up more from the hill-tops. That evening he made a kite and let it fly, which convinced the negroes that the good Msimu and the white man had also come down from the moon and were gods to be served with humility.

Though pleased with these demonstrations

of humility and adoration, Stasch was much more delighted on hearing that the Basso-Narok was a little more than ten days' journey distant, and that the inhabitants of the village in which they now lived often received salt from that country in return for palm-wine. The village king had even heard Fumba spoken of as being the ruler of people called "Doko." Kali said that the neighbors living a short distance away gave this name to the Wa-hima and Samburu.

The news that a great war was now raging on the banks of this vast sheet of water was not very reassuring, for in consequence of this it would be necessary to reach the Basso-Narok by marching over wild mountains and through deep ravines infested by beasts of prey. But Stasch was no longer afraid of such beasts, and he preferred the wildest mountains to the low plains, where fever lurked. So they courageously continued their journey.

After leaving that large village they passed but one other, a small settlement, that hung like a nest on the edge of a precipice. Then the country became mountainous, the hills in places being separated by deep ravines. To the east rose a dark chain of mountain-peaks, which, seen from a distance, looked quite black. They were now traveling through an unexplored stretch of country, and so they could not tell what might happen to them before they reached Fumba's land. On the mountain

442 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

slopes there were plenty of bananas, but with the exception of the dragon-tree and acacias, which stood out by themselves, the trees grew in groups, forming small groves. The travelers often halted in these groves to rest and renew their strength, as well as to enjoy the abundant shade.

The trees swarmed with birds. Many different species—large rhinoceros birds (which Stasch called pepper-eaters), roller, starling, laughing-dove, and countless beautiful “bengalis”—fluttered in the thick foliage or flew from one grove to another, singly or in groups, glittering in every color of the rainbow. Many trees, seen from a distance, appeared to be covered with colored flowers. Nell was particularly delighted on seeing flycatchers¹ and large black birds with bright red feathers on their breasts, whose voices sounded like a shepherd’s flute.² Beautiful bee-eaters, pink on top and pale-blue underneath, glistened in the sunlight, catching bees and dragonflies while on the wing. The screams of green parrots could be heard from the tree-tops, as could a sound of silver bells, the mutual greetings of small, gray-green birds hidden in the foliage.

Between sunset and dawn such large flocks of native sparrows³ flew past that but for their chirping and the flapping of their wings they might have been mistaken for clouds, and

¹ *Terpsichore viridis*.

² *Laniarius erythrogaster*.

³ *Quelia Æthiopica*.

Stasch would have thought that the songsters who made the trees vocal during the day were humming throughout the night.

But the children were still more surprised and delighted with some other birds which flew in flocks and sang delightfully. Each group consisted of five or six females and one male, with glittering, metal-like feathers. They alighted on acacias—the male perching on the top of the tree, while the females sat on the lower branches—and after the first notes, which sounded as though he were tuning his voice, the male began to sing, while the females listened in silence. When he had finished they repeated in unison the last refrain of his song. After a brief pause he would begin again, and when he had ended they would again repeat the refrain; then the flock would fly in an airy, wave-like line to the next acacia, and the concert of soloist and chorus would ring out once more through the silence of noon. The children never grew tired of listening. Nell would catch the notes and join the chorus, twittering the last tones in her little thin voice, which sounded like a quick repetition of the sounds, “tui, tui, tui, tui, twi-ling-ting, ting!” Once, when they were following the winged songsters from one tree to another, the children found that they were alone and nearly a kilometer away from their camping-place, for they had left the three negroes and King and Saba behind. Stasch, who had planned to go hunting,

444 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

had not wanted to take Saba for fear he might bark and frighten the game. When the flock of birds had flown from the last acacia to the other side of the broad ravine, the young boy stood still and said:

"Now I shall take you back to King, and then I shall see if there are any antelopes or zebras in the high jungle, for Kali says we have only enough smoked meat to last two days."

"But I am a big girl now," answered Nell, who was always desirous of showing that she was no longer a little girl, "and therefore I will return by myself. The camp and the smoke can easily be seen from here."

"I am afraid you might get lost."

"I shall not get lost. In the high jungle I might, but here—look how low the grass is."

"Something might attack you!"

"You said that lions and panthers do not hunt their prey in the daytime. Besides, do you hear how King is trumpeting because he is lonesome for us? What lion would dare to hunt where King's voice is heard?"

And she began to coax and in fact to be quite insistent on going.

"No, Stasch, I shall go alone. Remember, I am grown up!"

Stasch at first hesitated, but in the end let her have her own way. The camp and the smoke of the campfire could be distinctly seen, and King, who was lonesome without Nell,

trumpeted continually. As Nell had said, there was no fear of getting lost in the low grass, and as far as lions, panthers, and hyenas were concerned, they need not be taken into consideration, for these beasts hunt their prey only at night. Besides, he knew he could do nothing to please the girl more than to show her that he no longer considered her a child.

"Well, all right," he said; "go alone, but walk straight ahead and do not stop on the way."

"But may I pick these flowers myself?" she asked, pointing to a bush of kousso,¹ which was covered with a heavy mass of pink flowers.

"Yes, you may!"

With these words he turned around, and after taking the precaution of showing her the group of trees from which the smoke issued and from which King's trumpeting was heard, he disappeared into the high jungle at the edge of the ravine.

He had taken scarcely a hundred steps when he felt exceedingly anxious. "It was very stupid of me," he thought, "to let Nell go alone in the heart of Africa—how foolish, foolish! She is still a child! I should not have left her side even for an instant unless King had been with her. Who knows what may happen? Who knows whether there is not a snake under

¹ *Brojera Anthelmatica* is a beautiful plant, the seeds of which are a valuable remedy for tapeworm. It is mostly found in Southern Abyssinia.

446 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

that pinkish shrubbery, or large monkeys might come from this narrow pass and carry her off or bite her. Heaven help me! I have done a most foolish thing!"

Instead of being only uneasy, he now became angry with himself and terribly frightened. Without reasoning further, he turned back, as though with a foreboding of evil. He stepped quickly to one side, and, as a matter of habit, formed in his daily hunting expeditions, he held his gun ready to shoot and glided through the prickly mimosas as silently as a panther creeping upon an antelope herd at night. Then he thrust his head above the tall shrubbery—and stood there as if petrified.

Nell was standing under the kousso bush with hands extended; the pinkish flowers, which she had dropped in her dismay, lay at her feet, and about twenty feet away a large golden-yellow animal was creeping toward her through the low grass.

Stasch distinctly saw its green eyes fixed on the chalk-white face of the girl, he saw its bowed head and flattened ears, its upraised paw stretched forward, expressing its waiting and stealthy attitude, its long body and even longer tail, the end of which was moving with an almost imperceptible cat-like movement. Another moment—a spring—and it would have been the last of Nell!

At this sight the boy, accustomed as he was to danger, at once realized that if he did not im-

mediately regain his composure and presence of mind, if he were to shoot and merely wound the animal, no matter how badly, the girl would be doomed. Controlling himself, and stimulated by these thoughts, his arms and legs suddenly became as rigid as steel. Thanks to his habit of observation, he noticed a dark spot near the animal's ear, took aim, and pulled the trigger.

At the same instant came the report of the shot, a scream from Nell, and a dreadful growl. Stasch sprang in front of Nell, and while protecting her with his own body took aim again.

The second shot was quite unnecessary. The terrible cat lay stretched out like a rag, its nose on the ground, its paws in the grass, and it never even twitched. The bullet, an explosive one, had torn away the entire back of the head and neck, above which the eyes glared and the bloody, torn ganglia of the brain could be seen.

The little huntsman and Nell stood for a moment side by side, looking first at the slain beast, then at each other—speechless. Then a strange thing happened. Stasch, whose self-possession and calmness would have astonished the most experienced marksman, suddenly turned pale, his legs began to tremble, tears started from his eyes, he put his hands to his head and repeated over and over again:

"Oh, Nell, Nell, if I had not turned back!"

Here he was seized with terror, a terror bordering on despair, and every nerve in his body

twitched and trembled as if he had an attack of ague. After his tremendous mental and bodily tension there came a moment of weakness and lassitude. He imagined he saw the terrible beast lying in a dark cave tearing Nell's body to pieces with its bloody mouth. And indeed this might really have happened—it would have happened had he not turned back. A moment, a second more, and it would have been too late. These thoughts were too much for him to bear.

The result was that Nell, who was the first to recover from the fright, was obliged to comfort him. The dear little child threw both her small arms around his neck and wept, crying out as loudly as though trying to awaken him out of a sound sleep.

"Stasch! Stasch! Nothing has happened to me! Only look and see! Nothing has happened to me! Little Stasch! Dear Stasch!"

It was some time before Stasch recovered his composure and calmness. Soon after Kali arrived on the scene; he had heard a shot near the camp, and knowing that Bwana Kubwa never shot in vain, he immediately brought a horse to carry away the game. But when the young negro saw the slain beast he suddenly drew back and his face became ashen-gray.

"Wobol!" he screamed.

Not until now did the children approach the stiffening carcass, for Stasch as yet had no definite idea of the kind of beast he had shot.

At first sight the boy thought it might be a very large "serval,"¹ but on taking a nearer view he knew that he was mistaken, for the dead beast was even larger than a leopard. Its golden-yellow skin was dotted with chestnut-brown spots; but its head was narrower than that of a leopard and resembled somewhat that of a wolf; its legs were longer, its paws broader, and its eyes enormous. One of them had been completely torn away by the bullet; the second still stared at the children as if out of a chasm, immovable, frightful. Stasch felt sure that it was some species of panther which zoologists knew as little about as geographers did of the Basso-Narok Sea.

Kali continued to gaze with terror at the outstretched animal, repeating in an undertone, as if afraid to awaken it:

"Wobo!— The Great Man has killed a wobo!"

But Stasch, turning to the girl, laid his hand on her little head, as if he wanted to make sure that wobo had not stolen her, and said:

"Do you see, Nell, do you see that even if you were quite grown up, you ought not to go alone in the jungle?"

"You are right, Stasch," answered Nell with a penitent expression. "But may I go with you or with King?"

"Tell me, how did this happen? Did you hear it approach you?"

¹ A grey animal the size of a lynx, a species of tiger-cat.

450 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"No. A large golden fly flew out of the flowers, so I turned around toward it, and then I saw the beast just as it was creeping out from the ravine."

"And what happened next?"

"It stood still and began to look at me."

"Did it look at you long?"

"Long! It was only when I dropped the flowers and covered my face with my hands to protect myself that it began to creep up——"

Stasch knew that if Nell had been a negress she would have been carried off at once, and that she owed her deliverance to the surprise of the animal, which was disconcerted for a moment on the first sight of a creature so different from the people he had seen.

Again the boy shivered from head to foot.

"Thank heaven! Thank heaven that I turned back!"

Then he inquired further:

"What were you thinking of at that moment?"

"I wanted to call you, and—did not dare—but——"

"But—what?"

"But I thought that you would certainly defend me. I don't know——"

At these words she threw her arm around his neck once more, and he began to stroke her hair.

"Are you not afraid now?"

"No."

"My little Msimu! my Msimu! You see now what Africa is!"

"Yes. But you will kill all the vicious animals."

"Yes, so I will!"

Both took another look at the beast of prey. Stasch, who wished to keep its skin as a souvenir, told Kali to skin it, but the negro was afraid that a second wobo might appear from out of the ravine, and he begged not to be left there alone, and when asked whether he was really more afraid of a wobo than he was of a lion he said:

"A lion roars in the night and does not jump over a fence, but a wobo jumps over it in broad daylight, kills many negroes in the very heart of the village, and then steals one and eats him. Neither a spear nor a bow is any protection against a wobo, for a wobo can't be killed."

"Nonsense," said Stasch; "look at this one; isn't it quite dead?"

"White man can kill a wobo, but not black man!" answered Kali.

At last they took a rope and tied the enormous cat to the horse, and the latter dragged it toward the camp.

But Stasch was unable to keep the skin, because King, who apparently guessed that the wobo had attempted to steal his little mistress, flew into such a rage that even Stasch was unable to pacify him. Grasping the slain beast with his trunk, he threw it twice into the air,

452 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

then he began to beat it against a tree, and at last stamped it under his feet until it was a pulpy, formless mass. Stasch was only able to save its teeth, which with some other parts of its head he had laid down in the path of a swarm of ants, and an hour later they had cleaned up the bones so thoroughly that there was not a sign of flesh or of blood to be seen.

CHAPTER XIX

FOUR days later Stasch made a halt on a plateau that, although smaller and narrower than Linde Mountain, bore a great resemblance to it. That very evening Saba attacked a large baboon as he was playing with the remains of a kite—the second of those which the children had sent up before they started to travel toward the ocean—and after a hard fight bit him to death. Stasch and Nell, profiting by the halt to rest themselves, decided to continue making kites, but to send them up only when a strong monsoon was blowing from the west toward the east. Stasch calculated that if but one of them were to fall into the hands of Europeans or Arabians it would certainly excite unusual interest, and might be the means of a special expedition sent out to seek them. That his message might stand a better chance of being understood, he wrote on the kites not only in English and French, but also in Arabic, which was not difficult for him,

as he was familiar with that language. Shortly after they broke up camp here Kali said that in the chain of mountains which they saw toward the east he recognized many peaks as those which surround the large sheet of dark water, the Basso-Narok, but he was not quite positive, because the mountains assume different shapes, according to the position of the observer. After having passed a fairly broad valley covered with kousso bushes, that resembled a large pink sea, they came upon a solitary negro hut, inside of which were two hunters, one of whom was ill, having been bitten by a guinea-worm.¹ Both were so savage and stupid, so dismayed at the sight of these unexpected guests, and so certain that they intended to kill them, that at first they would give no information. It took a few strips of smoked meat to loosen the tongue of the sick man, who, besides being ill, was half starved, as his comrade allowed him but little food. From him they learned that one day's journey farther on there were some scattered hamlets, which were governed by two chiefs independent of each other, and that farther on, behind a steep mountain, lay the Fumba country, which extends from this great sheet of water toward the west and south. When Stasch heard this he felt that a great load had been lifted from him, and he took cour-

¹ *Filaria Medinensis*, a thin string-worm, from an inch to a yard in length ; its bite sometimes causes gangrene.

454 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

age once more. For were they not near the boundary of the land belonging to the Wa-hima tribe?

It was, of course, hard to tell how they would find the remainder of the journey, but in any event the boy had reason to hope that it would not be more fatiguing or longer than the terrible ride from the banks of the Nile to the plain where they now were, which distance he had accomplished, thanks to his wonderful quickness of action, and during which time he had saved Nell from death. He knew that the Wa-hima would welcome them most hospitably for Kali's sake, and would assist them in every way. Besides, he was accustomed to negroes, and knew how to manage them; so he felt pretty sure he could get along with them even without Kali.

"Do you know," he said to Nell, "that we have already covered more than half the distance between Fashoda and the sea, and during the remainder of our journey we may meet more savage negroes, but we are free from the Dervishes?"

"I prefer negroes," answered the girl.

"Yes, as long as you pass for an idol. I was stolen from Fayoum along with a girl called Nell, and now I am bringing a Msimu home. I shall tell my father and Mr. Rawlison that they are not to call you by any other name."

Her eyes began to twinkle merrily.

"Perhaps we shall see our papas in Mom-basa!"

"Perhaps. If it were not for the war raging on the banks of the Basso-Narok, we might accomplish our journey sooner. How provoking that Fumba should go to war just at this time!"

At these words he beckoned to Kali.

"Kali, has the sick negro heard anything about a war?"

"Yes. There is a great, a very great war between Fumba and Samburu."

"Then what will happen? How can we travel through the Samburu land?"

"The Samburu will run away from the great man, from King and from Kali."

"And from you?"

"And from Kali, for Kali has a gun that thunders and kills."

Stasch began to consider what part he would have to take in the war between the Wa-hima and Samburu tribes; he determined that the war should not interfere with their journey. He knew that their arrival would be a great surprise, and that it would give Fumba the upper hand. Therefore, all he need do would be to turn the prospective victory to his own advantage.

On arriving in the small villages of which the sick hunter had made mention, they made further inquiries in regard to the war. And the news became more and more reliable, but at

the same time unfavorable to Fumba. The small travelers learned that he was on the defensive, and that the Samburu, led by Mamba, their king, had taken a considerable portion of the Wa-hima's country and captured a great many cows. It was said that the seat of war was on the south bank of the large sheet of water, where Fumba's great "boma"¹ was situated, on a high and broad mountain.

This news made Kali feel very sad. He begged Stasch to travel as fast as he could over the mountain which separated them from the district that was menaced by the war, and he promised to find a road over which they could lead King as well as the horses. They were now in a country with which Kali was very familiar, and he recognized the mountain peaks he had known since childhood.

But it was no easy matter to cross the mountain, and if they had not been assisted by the inhabitants of the last village, whose good favor they had won with gifts, they would have had to find another road for King. But these people knew the ravines on this side of the mountain better than Kali did, and after a wearisome journey of two days and two nights, during which they suffered greatly from the cold, they were eventually able to lead the caravan over a narrow pass into a valley which from its appearance seemed to belong to the land of the Wa-himas.

¹ The same as the zareba in the Soudan. A large boma may also be a kind of castle or fortified camp.

Stasch made a halt to take a rest in this barren valley, which was enclosed by shrubbery, but Kali, who begged to be allowed to go on horseback to reconnoiter in the direction of his father's boma, which lay a day's journey distant, started off that very night. Stasch and Nell anxiously awaited his return for a whole following day and night, and they felt convinced that his strength must have given out, or that he must have fallen into the hands of the enemy. At last he reappeared on his weary and panting horse, he himself so tired and depressed that it made one sad to see him.

He prostrated himself at Stasch's feet and begged him to come to the rescue.

"Oh, Great Man," he said, "the Samburu have conquered Fumba's warriors and killed several of them, and those they have not killed they have driven out; and they are besieging Fumba in the great 'boma' on Boko Mountain. Fumba and his warriors have nothing to eat on the mountain and will perish if the Great Man does not kill Mamba and all the Samburus."

While begging, he clasped Stasch's knees; the latter frowned and considered what he should do, for, as always, Nell was his first consideration.

At length he asked, "Where are the warriors of Fumba whom the Samburus have dispersed?"

458 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Kali found them—and they will soon be here."

"How many of them are there?"

The young negro moved his fingers and toes several times, but apparently he could not give the exact number, for the simple reason that he could not count further than ten, and that every higher number was "wengi," which means "many."

"When they come, put yourself at their head and hasten to the relief of your father," said Stasch.

"They are afraid of the Samburus and would not go with Kali, but they would go with the Great Man and kill wengi, wengi Samburus."

Stasch thought the matter over once more.

"No," he said at last. "I can neither take Bibi to the battle nor leave her behind alone; nothing would tempt me to do it."

Thereupon Kali arose, folded his hands, and began repeating over and over again:

"Lunla! Lunla! Lunla!"

"What do you mean by Lunla?" asked Stasch.

"A great boma for the wives of the Wahimas and the Samburus," answered the young negro.

And he began to tell quite wonderful tales. For Fumba and Mamba had been at war with each other for several years. They had destroyed each other's plantations and stolen each other's cattle. But on the south bank of the

lake there was a place called Lunla, in which—even during the hardest battles—the women of both tribes assembled to hold their market. This place was sacred. The war only raged between the men; the fortunes of war did not affect the destiny of the women, who found a safe refuge in Lunla, their spacious market-place, which was enclosed by earthworks. During these disturbances many of them fled there with their children and possessions. Some came from even the most distant villages, bringing smoked meat, beans, millet, manioc, and various other kinds of provisions. The warriors were not allowed to battle nearer Lunla than within earshot of the crowing of a cock, and they were not allowed within the earthworks which encircled the market-place. They could only stand in front of the wall, and then the women handed them down provisions by means of long bamboo rods. This was an old-fashioned custom respected by both parties. But the victorious side always tried to hold the road to Lunla so as to prevent the vanquished from approaching near enough to the sacred place to hear the cock crow.

“Oh Great Man,” begged Kali once more, as he clasped Stasch’s knee, “the Great Man will bring Bibi to Lunla, and he will take King and Kali and the gun and the fiery snakes and he will conquer the wicked Samburus.”

Stasch believed the young negro’s story, for he had heard that in many parts of Africa

460 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

women are not affected by the wars. He remembered that a young German missionary in Port Said had once told him that the most warlike tribe of Masai, living in the vicinity of the great Kilima Njaro Mountain, followed this custom, and that consequently the wives of the warriors on either side could pass freely and unmolested to the market-place agreed upon without fear of being attacked.¹ Stasch was much pleased that this custom still prevailed on the banks of the Basso-Narok, for he felt confident that Nell would not be in any danger from the war. He also concluded to break up camp at once and take Nell to Lunla, which he was particularly desirous of doing, because a further journey was out of the question until the war was over, and the help of both the Wa-himas and the Samburus was necessary.

Accustomed as he was to make quick decisions, Stasch knew at once what to do. To release Fumba, to conquer the Samburus, to prevent the Wa-himas from taking too bloody a revenge, to command peace and reunite the antagonists seemed to him absolutely necessary, not only for his own sake, but also for the negroes. "It must be accomplished and it shall be!" he said to himself, and in the meanwhile, to pacify Kali, for whom he felt much sympathy, he explained to him that he by no means refused his assistance.

¹ An actual fact.

"How far is it from here to Lunla?" he asked.

"Half a day's journey."

"Then listen. We will take Bibi there at once; then I will ride on King and drive the Samburus from your father's boma. You will ride with me and fight against them."

"Kali will kill them with the gun."

His despair changed to joy at once; he began to hop, to laugh, and to thank Stasch with as much enthusiasm as if the victory were already won. Further outbursts of gratitude and joy were interrupted by the arrival of the warriors he had collected during his reconnoitering, and whom he had commanded to appear before the white man. There were about thirty men, armed with shields of hip-potamus skins, darts, bows, and knives.

On their heads they wore feathers, manes of baboons, and bouquets of ferns. On beholding an elephant in the service of a human being, on seeing Saba and the horses, they were seized with fear and surprise, just as was the case with the negroes in the villages through which the caravan had previously passed. But Kali had already told them that they would see a good Msimu and a powerful man, "who kills lions, who killed a wobo, of whom the elephant is afraid, who breaks rocks, makes fiery snakes rise in the air, etc. So instead of running away, they formed in a long line and stood there silent and aston-

ished, the whites of their eyes gleaming, for they were still uncertain whether they ought to kneel down or fall on their faces, but they firmly believed that, with the help of these extraordinary beings, the triumph of the Sam-burus would soon be at an end. Stasch rode on the elephant through the rank and file of the standing warriors like the leader of an army holding a review; then he made Kali repeat his promise to release Fumba, and gave orders to break camp for Lunla.

Kali rode in front with several warriors to tell the assembled wives of both tribes that they were to have rarer good fortune than ever before, in seeing the "good Msimu," who was coming to them riding on an elephant. This was such an extraordinary occurrence that even those women of the Wa-hima tribe who recognized Kali as the lost heir to the throne thought that the king's young son was trying to make fun of them, and they were surprised that he attempted to joke when the whole tribe and Fumba were in such desperate straits. But several hours later, when an enormous elephant with a white palanquin on his back was seen approaching the earthworks, they were nearly beside themselves with joy, and welcomed the good Msimu with such shouts and howls that Stasch mistook the uproar for outbursts of hatred, especially as these negroes were so hideously ugly that they looked like witches.

But this was their way of showing their great admiration. When Nell's tent was set up in a corner of the market-place, in the shade of two trees with luxuriant foliage, the Wa-hima and the Samburu women adorned it with garlands and wreaths of flowers; then they brought such a quantity of food that it was not only enough for the goddess herself, but also enough to last her retinue for a month. The delighted women even bowed before Mea, who was adorned with pink percale and several strings of blue glass beads, and for this reason, and also because she was Msimu's servant, she seemed to them to be of much higher rank than an ordinary negress.

Nasibu, on account of his youth, was also allowed within the enclosure, and he immediately profited by the offerings brought to Nell, and applied himself so conscientiously to eating that an hour later his little stomach resembled an African war-drum.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER resting a little while before the earth-works of Lunla, Stasch started off before sunset with Kali at the head of three hundred warriors to go to Fumba's boma, for he wanted to attack the Samburus by night, reckoning that in the darkness the "fiery snakes" would make a greater impression. The journey from Lunla to Boko Mountain, on which Fumba was

besieged, would take nine hours, counting the halt for rest, so that they would arrive before the fortress about three o'clock in the morning. Stasch made the warriors halt and commanded them to be silent; then he began to inspect the situation. The summit of the hill on which the defenders were waiting in ambush was wrapped in darkness, but the Samburus kept several campfires burning. Their light illuminated the steep sides of the cliff and the giant trees growing at its feet. And now from a distance could be heard the hollow sound of kettle-drums, as well as the shouts and singing of the warriors, who apparently were not sparing of the pombe¹ while celebrating their final victory. Stasch, at the head of his men, advanced still further, so that at last he was not more than a hundred feet from the last campfires. There seemed to be no one on guard anywhere, and the moonless night made it impossible for the savages to see the elephant, which was also hidden by the foliage. Stasch, sitting on King's neck, gave his final orders in a low tone of voice, and made a sign to Kali to set off one of the rockets.

A red streak spluttered, shot high up into the sky, and fell in a shower of red, blue, and golden stars. Then every voice ceased and a moment of silence ensued. A few seconds later two more fiery snakes ascended, making a crackling sound, and this time directed more

¹ An intoxicating beer made from millet.

horizontally toward the Samburus' camp; at the same time there were heard King's trumpeting and the howls of three hundred Wa-himas, who, armed with assegais,¹ clubs, and knives, came up on the run. The battle that ensued was all the more terrible because it took place in absolute darkness, for in the excitement all the campfires had been extinguished and trampled down. From the first moment that the Samburus saw the fiery snakes they were panic-stricken. What had taken place was absolutely beyond their comprehension. They only knew that some sort of terrible creatures had overtaken them and that fearful and inevitable destruction threatened them. Most of them fled before the spears and clubs of the Wa-himas touched them. Over a hundred warriors whom Mamba had gathered around him defended themselves despairingly, but when by the light of the shots they saw a giant animal and on it a being dressed in white, and heard the reports of the gun which Kali incessantly fired, they lost courage.

When Fumba, who was on the mountain, saw the first rocket burst in the air above him, he fell to the ground from fright and lay there several minutes as if lifeless. On recovering, he concluded, from the despairing howls of the warriors, that some kind of supernatural beings were slaying the Samburus. Then he thought that if he did not come to the assistance of these

¹ Lances and spears.

466 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

spirits their rage might also be turned against him, and as the destruction of the Samburus meant his deliverance, he collected all his warriors and crept out of the boma by means of a hidden side passage, and thus quickly reached most of those trying to escape. The fight thus changed into a slaughter. The kettledrums of the Samburus ceased to rumble. The darkness was penetrated only by the red flashes from Kali's gun, the shrieks of dying warriors, the groans of the wounded, and the hollow beating of clubs on shields rang through the air. No one begged for quarter, for the negroes know no mercy.

For fear of hitting his own people in the confusion and darkness, Stasch at last ceased firing, and grasping Gebhr's sword, threw himself on the enemy. The Samburus could now escape from the mountains to the frontier only by passing through a broad ravine, but Fumba and his warriors blocked this narrow pass, and every one of the fugitives was slain save those who threw themselves on the ground and surrendered, though they knew that cruel slavery or immediate death awaited them from the conquerors. Mamba defended himself heroically until a club smashed in his skull. His son, the young Faru, fell into the hands of Fumba, who ordered him bound as a future thanksgiving offering for the spirits who had come to his assistance.

Stasch did not lead the terrible King into

the battle, but only allowed him to roar, which frightened the enemies much more. He did not shoot once at the Samburus, for in the first place, before leaving Lunla he promised little Nell not to kill any one, and secondly, he had really no desire to kill people who had never done him or Nell any harm. He was satisfied in having secured the victory for the Wa-himas and in having released the besieged Fumba. When Kali came running up soon after with the news of the final victory, he ordered him to stop the battle, which was still raging in the clefts of the rocks and was being prolonged by Fumba's fury.

But it was daylight before Kali could accomplish this. As is usual in tropical countries, the sun rose quickly behind the mountains and flooded with its bright light the battlefield, where lay more than two hundred Samburu corpses. Some time later, when the fighting ceased and the joyful howling of the Wa-himas disturbed the morning calm, Kali reappeared, but with such a sad and sorry countenance that it was very evident, even from a distance, that some mishap had befallen him. Standing still before Stasch, he began to pound his head with his fists and to cry out in a sad voice:

"O Great Man! Fumba kufa! Fumba kufa!"¹

"Killed?" repeated Stasch questioningly.

Kali related what had happened, and from

¹Fumba is dead.

his words it was readily understood that this sad misfortune was the result of Fumba's revenge, for after the battle was over he attempted to kill two Samburus, and from one of them he received a thrust from a lance.

The news was soon dispersed among the Wa-himas, and an excited group surrounded Kali. Soon afterward six warriors carried the old king on spears. He was not dead, but mortally wounded. He wanted to see, before he died, the powerful man on an elephant who was the true conqueror of the Samburus. Astonishment was in his eyes, but the haze of death was also veiling them; and his pale and stiffening lips whispered softly:

"Yancig! Yancig!"

Shortly after his head sank back, his mouth opened wide and he expired.

Kali, who loved him, threw himself on his breast and wept. Some of the warriors began to beat their heads, others to proclaim Kali king and to cry out, "Yancig!" in his honor. Others fell on their faces before the young ruler. Not one dissenting voice was heard, for Kali was their king not only because he was Fumba's eldest son, but also because he had gained the victory.

Meanwhile in the sorcerers' huts and in the boma on the mountain-top the wild roaring of the bad Msimu could be heard. At first it was like the sound that Stasch had heard before in the negro village, but this time it was not di-

rected against him, but demanded the death of the prisoners for killing Fumba. The drums beat, the warriors formed in a long line, each row consisting of three men, and then began a war-dance around Stasch, Kali, and the corpse of Fumba.

"Oa! Oa! Yach! Yach!" repeated all the voices, their heads wagging right to left in a monotonous manner, the whites of their eyes shining, and the points of their spears gleaming in the morning sun.

Kali stood up, turned to Stasch, and said:

"The Great Man will bring Bibi to the boma and live in Fumba's hut. Kali will be king of the Wa-himas and the Great Man king over Kali."

Stasch nodded his head as a sign of approval, but he remained there a few hours longer, for he and King needed a rest.

He did not leave until toward evening. During his absence the corpses of the Samburus were carried away and thrown into a deep ravine near by, over which a great many buzzards immediately settled. The sorcerers now made preparation for Fumba's burial, and Kali assumed the rulership as an absolute monarch, with power of life and death over all his subjects.

"Do you know who Kali is?" Stasch asked the girl on the way back from Lunla.

Nell looked at him in surprise.

"He is your servant!"

470 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Oho! A servant! Kali is now king of all the Wa-himas."

This news amused Nell very much. This sudden change, by which the former slave of the treacherous Gebhr and later Stasch's servant had become king, struck Nell as extraordinary and exceedingly droll.

Linde's remark that the negroes were like children, incapable of remembering what happened from one day to another, did not apply to Kali, for scarcely had Stasch and Nell reached the foot of Boko Mountain than the young monarch ran hastily toward them, greeted them with the usual reverence and joy, and repeated the same words he had spoken before:

"Kali be king of the Wa-himas and the Great Man king over Kali."

His admiration was so great that he all but worshiped Stasch; he made a very low bow to Nell before the assembled people, for, from what he had observed during the journey, he knew that the Great Man was more concerned about the little Bibi than about himself.

After he had solemnly led Stasch and Nell up to the summit where the boma was, he assigned Fumba's hut to them; it resembled a large shed divided into several rooms. He ordered the Wa-hima women, who accompanied them from Lunla, and who never tired of gazing at the good Msimu, to put vessels of honey and sour milk in the first room, and

when he heard that the Bibi, who was very much fatigued from the journey, had fallen asleep, he commanded all the people to keep perfectly quiet, under penalty of having their tongues cut out. He now decided to pay them still greater homage, and so when Stasch appeared before the shed after a short rest, Kali approached, bowed low before him, and said:

"To-morrow Kali will give orders to bury Fumba and to behead as many slaves for Fumba and Kali as there are fingers on both their hands; and to propitiate Bibi and the Great Man Kali will order Faru, the son of Mamba, to be beheaded, and also wengi, wengi other Samburus taken prisoners by the Wa-himas.

Stasch frowned, and gazing severely into Kali's eyes, replied:

"I forbid it."

"Sir," said the young negro in a trembling voice, "the Wa-himas always behead their prisoners. When the old king dies they behead people; if a young king follows they behead people. If Kali does not command them to be killed the Wa-himas will not believe that Kali is king!"

Stasch looked at him still more severely:

"Well, how's that?" said he. "And did you not learn anything on Linde Mountain? Are you not a Christian?"

"I am, O Great Man!"

"Then listen! The Wa-himas have black

brains, but your brains must be white. As you are now their king, you must enlighten and teach them what you learned from me and Bibi. They are now like jackals and hyenas—make human beings of them. Tell them that it is forbidden to behead prisoners of war, for the Great Spirit to whom Bibi and I pray punishes those who shed innocent blood. White people do not behead prisoners, and you would treat them even more cruelly than Gebhr did you—and you a Christian! Shame on you, Kali! Replace the ancient and savage customs of the Wa-himas by humane ones and God will bless you, and Bibi will not say that Kali is a savage, a stupid and vicious negro.”

A terrible roaring from the sorcerers' huts drowned his words. Stasch waved his hand excitedly and continued: “I hear! Your Msimu wants the blood and the heads of the prisoners. But you know quite well what this is, and so you are not frightened at this noise. Therefore I only say this much to you: Take a bamboo rod, go into every hut and thrash the sorcerers until they roar louder than their kettle-drums, and throw the kettle-drums into the midst of the boma, so that all the Wa-himas may see and comprehend how these villains are deceiving them; and at the same time tell your stupid Wa-himas what you told M'Rua's people—that where the good Msimu dwells the blood of human beings must not be shed.”

Stasch's words apparently had some weight

with the young king, for he looked at him a moment and answered:

"Kali will thrash the sorcerers well, will throw out the kettle-drums, and tell the Wahimas that where the good Msimu is no blood must be shed. But what shall Kali do with Faru and the Samburus who have killed Fumba?"

Stasch, who had already planned everything, had anticipated this question, immediately answered:

"Your father was slain, his father was slain, so both were slain. You must form a brotherhood with young Faru, then the Wahimas and the Samburus will live together in peace, planting manioc and hunting together. You must tell Faru about the Great Spirit, and Faru will love you like a brother."

"Kali now have white brains!" answered the young negro.

And thus the conversation ended. Soon afterward savage roars resounded once more, but this time not from the wicked Msimu, but from the two sorcerers, whose skin Kali was thrashing as hard as he could. The warriors, who had remained below standing in a circle around King, hurried up the hill to see what was the matter; they saw with their own eyes and heard from the words of the sorcerers themselves that the wicked Msimu, before whom they were accustomed to tremble, was only a hollowed-out tree trunk covered with

474 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

monkey-skin. And when they told young Faru that in deference to the wishes of the good Msimu and the Great Man he was not to be beheaded, but that Kali would eat a piece of him and he a piece of Kali, he could not trust his senses; then on hearing to whom he owed his life, he pushed himself before the entrance to Fumba's hut and lay there until Nell came out and bade him arise. Then he took hold of her little foot with his black hands and placed it on his head, as a sign that he would remain her slave for the rest of his life.

The Wa-himas were very much surprised at such orders of the young king, but the presence of the unknown guests, whom they looked upon as the most powerful sorcerers in the world, awed them to silence. The older people were displeased with the new customs, and the two sorcerers, realizing that all their good times were over, swore in their hearts to take terrible vengeance on the king and the newcomers.

Meanwhile Fumba was solemnly buried at the foot of the mountain under the boma. Kali planted a bamboo cross on his grave, and the negroes placed on it several vessels containing pombe and smoked meat, so that his spirit would not disturb them during the night.

After the ceremony of the brotherhood between Kali and Faru was over, Mamba's corpse was given to the Samburus.

CHAPTER XXI

WELL, can you tell how many journeys we have made since we left Fayoum?" asked Stasch.

"Yes."

The girl raised her eyebrows and began to count on her fingers.

"Let me see: From Fayoum to Khartum—the first journey; from Khartum to Fashoda—the second; from Fashoda to the gorge, where we found King—the third; from Linde Mountain to the lake—the fourth!"

"Right. Perhaps there is not another fly in the world who has flown through so much of Africa."

"This fly would have been in a nice plight without you."

And he began to laugh.

"A fly on an elephant! A fly on an elephant!"

"But no tsetse. Ah, Stasch, no tsetse?"

"No," he replied; "a more agreeable kind of fly."

Nell, satisfied with this praise, leaned her little face on his arm and asked:

"And when shall we start on our fifth journey?"

"As soon as you are rested and I have taught these people, whom Kali has promised to send along with us, how to shoot a little."

"And are we going to travel very long?"

476 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Oh, long, Nell, long! Who knows if this won't be the longest road?"

"And you will, as you always do, find a way out of all our difficulties?"

"I *must*."

Stasch really did the best he could, but the fifth journey required great preparation. They were going once more into unknown districts, in which there lurked innumerable dangers, and against these the boy wished to take greater precautions than he had ever done before. For this reason he taught forty young Wa-himas to shoot with Remington rifles, for he thought they would form a picked troop and would also serve as a guard for Nell. He could not train more men to shoot, for King had only carried twenty-five rifles and the horses had carried fifteen. The rest of the army was to be made up of a hundred Wa-himas and a hundred Samburus armed with lances and bows, which Faru promised to supply, and whose presence solved the difficulties of the journey through the long stretch of wild country inhabited by the Samburu tribes. Stasch recollected with pride how he had fled from Fashoda, traveling with no one but Nell and two negroes, and that he had had no help of any kind; so he now thought that, being in command of two hundred armed men, and having an elephant and some horses, he could soon reach the coast. He tried to imagine what Englishmen, who lay such stress on forming resolutions, would say

THROUGH THE DESERT 477

to this, and especially what his father and Mr. Rawlison would say, and this made every difficulty appear light.

Nevertheless, he was very uneasy for Nell's safety and for his own. Sure enough, he would most likely have little difficulty in passing through the Wa-hima and Samburu territory, but what would follow? What kind of tribes would he be likely to meet, through what countries and how many miles would he have to travel? Linde's directions had not been specific enough. Stasch was very much worried because he had no idea where he was, for this part of Africa was represented as a white spot on the maps which he had studied. Besides, he had not the least idea what the Basso-Narok Lake really was like or how large it was. He happened to be on its south bank, where it appeared to be some ten kilometers wide. But how far the lake stretched toward the north was something that neither the Wa-himas nor the Samburus could tell him. Kali, who knew the Ki-swahili language fairly well, answered all questions with "bali, bali," which meant "far, far," and that was all that Stasch could get him to say.

As in the north, the mountains at the horizon appeared to be fairly near, and he supposed that this water was a small salt lake, many of which are to be found in Africa. Several years later it was evident that he had been mistaken.¹

¹This was the large lake discovered by the famous explorer Teleki in 1888, and named Rudolf Lake.

478 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

For the present it was not absolutely necessary to be more familiar with the banks of the Basso-Narok, but it was important to find out whether a river flowed from it, eventually emptying itself into the ocean. The Samburus, Faru's subjects, declared that to the east of their country lay a large, waterless desert, which no one had ever crossed. Stasch knew the negroes well from the stories of travelers and from Linde's adventures, as well as from his own experiences with them, and he was convinced that as soon as danger and weariness would overtake them many would return home, and perhaps not a single one remain with him. In this case he would find himself in the middle of the desert alone with Nell, Mea, and the little Nasibu. But, above all, he recognized that the lack of water would break up and disperse the caravan. Following the water-course, it would be impossible to suffer the tortures which attack all travelers in arid regions, so he inquired where a stream could be found.

But the Samburus were unable to give him any reliable information, and he could not take a lengthy excursion along the eastern bank of the lake because other duties retained him at the boma. He was of the opinion that of all the kites he had sent up from Linde Mountain and from the negro villages through which they had passed, probably not one had flown over the chain of mountains surrounding the Basso-

Narok. For this reason it was necessary to make new ones and send them up, for these were the only ones the wind could carry far off over the flat desert, perhaps to the ocean. He had to give his personal attention to this matter, for Nell was very skilful in making the kites and Kali had learned how to send them up, but neither was able to write on them the necessary message. Stasch believed this to be a matter of the greatest importance, which should on no account be neglected.

These duties occupied so much time that the caravan was not ready to start for three weeks. On the evening before they intended to depart the young king of the Wa-himas appeared before Stasch, made a low bow, and said:

"Kali will go with the master and with Bibi as far as the sheet of water on which the large rafts of the white men swim."

This proof of devotion touched Stasch, but he did not feel he had the right to take the boy on such an extended journey, from which he might not be able to return in safety."

"Why do you want to go with us?" he asked.

"Kali loves the Great Man and Bibi."

Stasch laid his hand on the woolly head.

"Kali, I know that you are a true and faithful boy. But what will happen to your kingdom, and who will reign over the Wa-himas in your place?"

"M'Lana, a brother of Kali's mother."

Stasch knew that negroes fight for the

throne, that power attracts them just as it does white people; he thought a while and then said:

"No, Kali! I can not take you along. You must stay with the Wa-himas in order to make good people of them."

"Kali return to them."

"M'Lana has many sons, and what would happen if he should aspire to be king himself and to leave his kingdom to his sons, and therefore instigate the Wa-himas against you, so that they drive you away when you seek to return?"

"M'Lana is good. He no do that!"

"But if he does do it?"

"Then Kali will go to the great sheet of water, to the Great Man and Bibi."

"We shall not be there then."

"Then Kali will sit down near the water and weep for sorrow."

At these words he folded his hands over his head and whispered:

"Kali loves the Great Man and Bibi—very much!" And two large tears shone in his eyes.

Stasch hesitated, not knowing what to do. He felt sorry for Kali, but he did not grant his request at once. He knew that—apart from the dangers he might encounter on the return journey—if M'Lana or the sorcerers were to incite the negroes, not only would the young negro be banished from his country, but his life would be endangered.

"It will be much better for you to stay here," he said; "much better!"

But while he was speaking Nell appeared; she had overheard the whole conversation through the thin partition which separated the caravan, and when she saw tears in Kali's eyes she wiped them away with her little fingers, and turning to Stasch, said:

"Kali will go with us!" This she spoke in a decided tone.

"Oho!" answered Stasch, a little hurt. "You are not the one to decide."

"Kali will go with us!" she repeated.

"Perhaps not!"

Then she suddenly stamped her little foot, saying:

"I wish it!" And burst into tears.

Stasch looked at her in great surprise, as if unable to understand what had happened to the child, who was usually so good and so gentle, but when he saw how she put both little fists up to her eyes and with open mouth gasped for air like a little bird, he at once said:

"Kali shall go with us—yes, he shall go with us! Why are you crying? How unreasonable you are! He shall go! Do you hear? He shall go!"

And so it was settled. Stasch felt ashamed of himself all that day because of his weakness in giving in to the "good Msimu," and she, having gained her point, was as quiet, gentle, and submissive as ever.

CHAPTER XXII

THE caravan started on its journey at sunrise the following day. The young negro felt very happy, the little despot was gentle and obedient, and Stasch was full of energy and hope. A hundred Wa-himas accompanied them, forty of the latter being armed with Remington rifles, which they knew how to use quite well. Their white leader, who had instructed them for three weeks, knew that at a given signal they would make a great deal of noise, but do little damage; he also knew that in a conflict with savage people noise plays as important a part as do bullets, and he was pleased with his guards. The caravan took away large quantities of manioc, little baked cakes made of big fat ants carefully dried and ground to flour, and also a great deal of smoked meat. About ten women also accompanied the caravan, and they carried various things for Nell's comfort and water-bags made of antelope skins. From the elephant's back Stasch supervised and gave orders, which were perhaps not exactly necessary, but he did this more because he loved to play the rôle of the leader of an army; indeed, he surveyed his small army with pride.

"If I wanted to," he said to himself, "I could be king of all these tribes—just as Benjowski was in Madagascar!"

And the thought flashed through his brain

that perhaps it would be well to return here eventually, subjugate a whole region, civilize the negroes, and found a new Poland in this country, or even to leave for old Poland at the head of an army of trained negro soldiers; but feeling this was an absurd idea, and doubting whether his father would give him permission to play the part of an Alexander of Macedon in Africa, he did not confide these thoughts to Nell, who was the only person in the world who would agree with him.

Besides, it would be essential to be independent of these savages before attempting to conquer this part of Africa, and so he busied himself with what lay nearest him. The caravan advanced in a rope-like line. Stasch, on King, had determined to bring up the rear, so as to be able to have everything under his own eyes.

When the people marched past him in single file he noticed with surprise that the two sorcerers, M'Kunji and M'Pua, who had been thrashed by Kali, also belonged to the caravan, and were carrying baggage on their heads and marching along with the others.

He stopped them and asked:

"Who told you you might go along with us?"

"The king," answered both, bowing very low.

But under the mask of humility their eyes shone so wildly and their faces bore such an expression of rage that at first Stasch felt like

driving them away, and was only prevented because he did not wish to undermine Kali's authority.

Calling Kali to him, he asked:

"Did you order the sorcerers to go with us?"

"Kali told them to, for Kali is clever."

"Therefore I again ask you, why did your cleverness not leave them at home?"

"If M'Kunji and M'Pua had remained, they would have stirred up the Wa-himas so that they would have killed Kali on his return, and if they go along with us Kali will look out for them and put a guard on them."

Stasch considered a while and said:

"Perhaps you are right; but be on the alert day and night, for there is mischief in their eyes."

"Kali has bamboos," answered the young negro.

The caravan now set forth. At the last moment Stasch ordered that the guards equipped with Remington rifles should close the procession, for they were selected and trusted men. During the gun practising they had in a way become fond of their young leader, and because they guarded his illustrious person they felt themselves more favored than the others. They now had to guard the entire caravan and to capture those who attempted to run away. It was evident that as soon as danger or fatigue came there would be plenty of deserters.

On the first day, however, everything was

peaceful as could be. The negroes with the burdens on their heads, each armed with a spear and several smaller darts, wound through the jungle in one long line. For a while they advanced over a flat tract on the southern border of the lake, but as high mountain summits enclosed the lake on all sides, they found on turning toward the east that it was necessary to climb over the hills. The old Samburus, who knew this country, declared that the caravan would have to cross narrow passes which lay between the mountains Kulall and Imo, and that until they reached the other side they would not come to the flat land south of Bovani. Stasch knew that they could not march directly eastward, for he remembered that Mombasa lay several degrees the other side of the equator, and therefore a considerable distance south of this unknown lake. But as he still possessed several of Linde's compasses he was not afraid of losing his way.

The quarters for the first night were arranged on a woody height.

As soon as it had become dark a great many campfires flashed forth, around which the negroes roasted dried meat and ate cakes made of manioc roots, which they took out of the pots with their fingers. After they had appeased their hunger and thirst they talked over matters with one another, speculating as to where "Bwana Kubwa" was going to lead them, and what they would receive for their

services. Some sang as they squatted on the ground like Turks and stared into the fire, but they all talked so long and so loudly that at last Stasch was obliged to command silence so that Nell could sleep.

The night was very cool, but the next morning when the first rays of sunlight lighted up the scene the air became warm. At sunrise the small travelers beheld a peculiar sight. They were just approaching a lake about two hundred kilometers long, or what might be called a large puddle, which had been formed in a mountain valley by the rain, when Stasch, who was sitting alongside of the girl on King and surveying his surroundings through the telescope, suddenly cried:

"Nell, look! See the elephants going to the water!"

Half a kilometer away could be seen a herd of five beasts slowly advancing single file toward the small lake.

"But these are strange looking elephants," said Stasch, who was still regarding them very attentively. "They are not so large as King, and have much smaller ears, and as for tusks, I don't see any at all."

Meanwhile the elephants went into the water, but they did not pause on the bank like King usually did, and did not bathe themselves with their trunks, but steadily advancing, they went deeper and deeper into the water, so that at last only their black backs, resembling pieces

of rock, stood out over the surface of the water.

"What's that? They are diving!" cried Stasch.

The caravan was slowly approaching the bank, and at last reached it. Stasch ordered a halt, and gazed with the greatest surprise, first at Nell, then at the lake. There was nothing to be seen of the elephants except five dots looking like red flowers riding above the surface of the water and rocking gently to and fro.

"They are standing on the bottom, and these are the ends of their trunks," exclaimed Stasch, scarcely believing his own eyes. Then he called to Kali:

"Kali, did you see?"

"Yes, sir, Kali has seen; those are water-elephants,"¹ answered the young negro calmly.

"Water-elephants?"

"This is not the first time Kali has seen them!"

"And they live in the water?"

"In the night they go into the jungle and graze; in the daytime they live in the lake, just like the riboks.² They do not go out until after sunset."

¹In Africa there are many unraveled mysteries. Tales of water-elephants had repeatedly reached the ears of explorers, but no one credited them. Lately the Paris Museum of Natural History commissioned Monsieur Le Petit, who had seen water-elephants on the shores of Lake Leopold in the Congo, to write on the subject. This report can be seen in the German Magazine "Kosmos."

²Hippopotamus.

For some time Stasch could not recover from his surprise, and had he not been in a hurry to continue the journey he would have held back the caravan till the evening, so as to have a better opportunity of observing these peculiar beasts. But it also occurred to him that the elephants might emerge on the opposite side of the lake, and even if they were to come out of the water at any nearer place, it would be difficult to see them well in the dark.

So he gave the command to depart, but on the way he said to Nell:

"Nell, we have seen something which no European has ever seen before. And do you know what I think? That if we are lucky enough to reach the ocean no one will believe me when I tell them that there are water-elephants in Africa."

"And if you had caught one of them and had taken it along with you to the ocean?" said Nell, who, as usual, felt satisfied that Stasch could do anything.

CHAPTER XXIII

AFTER traveling ten days the caravan issued from the mountain pass and entered a very different region, an extended plain, mostly level, but broken here and there by small, wave-like hillocks. The vegetation was completely changed. No large trees towered above the waving, grassy plain. Only here and there,

quite far apart, there sprang up rubber-acacias, with coral-colored and umbrella-shaped stems, but scanty foliage, and therefore furnishing but little shade. In some places between the ant-hills a species of euphorbia, with branches resembling the arms of a candlestick, grew taller than the grass. Hawks soared high in the air, and lower down black and white feathered crow-like birds flew from one acacia bush to the other. The grass was yellow and had ears like ripe corn. The dried-up jungle seemed to furnish abundant food for many different kinds of animals, for during the day the travelers often met large herds of antelope and a great many zebras. The heat on the open and treeless plain became unbearable. The sky was cloudless, the days were fiery hot, and the night did not bring much relief.

Day by day the journey grew more arduous. The small villages through which the caravan passed were inhabited by the wildest savages, who were so terror-stricken that they received the travelers very reluctantly, and if it had not been for the numerous armed men and the sight of white faces, and King and Saba, great danger would have threatened them.

Stasch, aided by Kali, learned that there were no more villages farther on, and that they were coming to a waterless district. The tales they heard were hard to believe, for the numerous animals they saw must have found some watering-place. But these stories of a

490 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

desert in which there was rumored to be neither stream nor puddle frightened the negroes, and some of them deserted the party, and M'Kunji and M'Pua set the example. Fortunately, their flight was quickly perceived, and the mounted troupe which accompanied the travelers discovered them before they had gotten far from the camp. When they were brought back Kali, by the aid of a bamboo rod, convinced them of the inadvisability of such a course. Stasch assembled the whole company and gave them a lecture, which the young negro translated into their native language. Dwelling on the fact that at their last headquarters they had heard lions roaring around the camp all night, Stasch did his best to convince his people that any one attempting to run away would certainly become their prey, or if he were to pass the night in an acacia tree the still more terrible wobos would lie in wait for him. He also said that where there are antelope there must also be water, and that if in the course of their journey they were to strike waterless regions, they could take with them enough water for two or three days in bags of antelope skin. The negroes paid strict attention to what he said, and continually repeated:

"Oh, mother, how true it is!" but the following night five Samburus and two Wa-himas deserted, and from that time some one was missing every night. But M'Kunji and M'Pua did not make a second attempt to escape for the

simple reason that Kali had them bound at sundown every night.

The country became drier and drier, the sun beat down mercilessly on the jungle, and not a single acacia could now be seen. They still came across herds of antelope, though fewer than they had seen previously. The donkey and the horses so far had enough food, for beneath the high dried grass they found in many places short, green grass only slightly scorched by the sun. But King, although he was not fastidious, became much thinner. On approaching an acacia he would break it apart with his head and trunk and fill himself with young leaves and pods. Until now the caravan had always been able to strike water, though it was often bad and had to be filtered, or so salty that it was not fit to drink. Then it often happened that the men Stasch sent out in advance under Kali's guidance would return without having found a single puddle or even a tiny brook in the hollows of the ground, and Kali would proclaim in troubled tones, "Madi apana"—"There is no water there."

Stasch was soon convinced that this long, final journey would certainly not be easier than the ones they had accomplished before, and he began to worry about Nell, for a great change had also come over her. Her face, instead of being tanned by the sun and wind, had become paler and paler day by day and her eyes had lost their accustomed brilliancy. Fortunately, on

492 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

these dry plains there were no flies nor danger of fever, but it was very evident that the unbearable heat was wasting away the girl's strength. Even now the boy looked sadly and apprehensively at her little hands, which had become as white as paper, and he bitterly reproached himself for having lost so much time in making preparations and in instructing the negroes how to shoot that he had to continue the journey in the hottest time of the year.

With these anxieties the days passed. Even more greedily and mercilessly the sun drank the dampness and the life from the earth. The grass shriveled and dried up until it was so brittle that it broke off under the hoofs of the antelope, which threw up clouds of dust as they passed. But the travelers now found a small stream, which they distinguished from a distance by the long rows of trees growing on its banks. The negroes ran as fast as they could toward the trees, and on arriving at the bank threw themselves down side by side on the ground, dipping their heads in the water and drinking so greedily that they only desisted when a crocodile caught one of them by the hand. Other negroes immediately hastened to the assistance of their comrade and drew the horrible reptile out of the water at once, but it would not let go of the man's hand, although they opened its jaws with spears and knives. King, however, made an end of it by trampling it under foot, as if it had been a rotten mush-

room. When the negroes had at last quenched their thirst, Stasch ordered a round fence of tall bamboos to be erected in the shallow water, so it could only be entered from one side of the bank, that Nell might bathe in privacy. The girl was greatly refreshed by the bath, after which she lay down, and after a rest felt greatly strengthened.

To the great delight of the whole caravan, including Nell, Bwana Kubwa decided to remain ten days near the water. When this became known all felt so happy that they forgot the fatigue they had experienced; some, after being restored by a good nap, wandered among the trees near the stream looking for palms that bear wild dates,¹ called Job's tears,² of which necklaces are made. Some of them returned before sunset carrying in their hands square, white objects, which Stasch recognized as his own kites.

One of these kites bore the number seven, which proved that it had been sent up from Linde Mountain, for the children had sent up at least ten from that place. The sight of this pleased Stasch so much that he took heart again.

"I had no idea," he said to Nell, "that the kites could fly so far. I was sure that they would be entangled in the peaks of the Karamajo Mountains, and I only sent them up

¹ *Phoenix Senegalensis*.

² *Coix Lacrymax-Jobi*.

thinking to let them take their chance. But now I see that the wind can carry them in any direction, and I trust those we sent up from the mountains around the Basso-Narok and on the road here will fly as far as the ocean."

"They will certainly fly there," said Nell.

"So be it!" said the boy to strengthen his trust, while thinking of the dangers and difficulties that still lay before them on their journey.

The third day the caravan started off again, taking with them a large supply of water in the leather bags. Before nightfall they again came to a region dried up by the rays of the sun. Not even an acacia was to be seen, and the ground in some places resembled a threshing-floor. Occasionally they came across passiflora with stems penetrating the ground and resembling huge bottle-gourds,¹ as much as four feet or more in diameter. From these enormous balls grew lianas, thin as twine, which crept along the ground quite a distance, forming such an impenetrable thicket that even mice would have had a hard time to find a way through it. But notwithstanding the beautiful green of these plants, which remind one of the European bear's-foot, they were so very thorny that neither King nor the horses could eat any part of them. The donkey, however, nibbled at them, though very carefully.

At times they saw nothing for several miles

¹ *Adenia globosa*.

except coarse short grass and flowers of a low order, like the Dürrblumen,¹ which breaks off at the merest touch. On their first day in this place the sun beat down in fiery heat all day long. The air quivered as it does in the Libyan desert. The earth was so flooded with light that all objects appeared white. Not a sound, not even the buzzing of insects, broke the deathlike stillness, through which penetrated the wilting glare.

All in the party were bathed in perspiration. Now and again they would lay down the baggage, the dried meat, and the shields in a large pile, so as to find shade beneath it. Stasch gave orders to be sparing of the water; but negroes are like children, who take no thought for the morrow. At last it became necessary to place a guard around those who carried the bags of provisions, and to deal out a fixed allowance of water to each one separately. Kali fulfilled this task very conscientiously, but it consumed a great deal of time, retarded their march, and therefore the finding of new watering-places. The Samburus now complained that the Wahimas were given more water than they, and the Wahimas complained that the preference was shown to the Samburus. The latter now threatened to turn back, but Stasch gave them to understand that if they did Faru would have them beheaded, and he himself ordered the hunters, who were armed with Remington

¹ Plants peculiarly adapted to dry climates.

rifles, to keep guard and see that no one escaped.

The second night they passed on a barren plain. No boma, or, as they called it in the Sudanese language, zareba, was erected, for there was nothing there to build it of.

King and Saba formed the camp guards, which in reality was sufficient protection; but King, who had not been given a tenth of the water he needed, trumpeted for it until sunrise, and Saba hung out his tongue, turned his eyes toward Stasch and Nell, silently begging for at least a few drops of water to drink. The girl asked Stasch to give the dog a little drink of water out of one of the rubber bags which they had found among Linde's things, and which he wore attached to a cord around his neck, but he was keeping this for the little girl, in case of dire necessity, and refused her request.

Toward evening of the fourth day there were only five small bags of water left, containing hardly enough to give each person half a glassful. But as the nights were always cooler than the days, one is not so thirsty then as under the burning rays of the sun, and as every one had been given a little water to drink in the morning, Stasch ordered that the water-bags be reserved for the following day. The negroes grumbled at this, but they still stood in such awe of Stasch that they did not dare to tamper with the little that was left, especially as there were

always two men armed with Remington rifles keeping guard over the water-bags, who relieved each other every hour. The Wa-himas and the Samburus quenched their thirst as best they could by pulling up miserable blades of grass and chewing their small roots, but even these had retained no moisture, for the merciless sun had sucked it all out of the ground.¹

Although sleep did not quench their thirst, it at least enabled them to forget it. At night every one of the party, tired and exhausted from the day's march, dropped down where he stood, apparently lifeless, and fell fast asleep. Stasch also slept, but he was too much worried and troubled to sleep long and restfully. After a few hours he awoke and began to wonder what the future would bring forth and where he could find water for Nell and the whole caravan, man and beast. The situation was difficult and even terrible, but as yet the sensible boy did not yield to despair. He recalled all that had happened since they had been carried off from Fayoum until the present moment—the first great journey through the Sahara, the hurricane in the desert, the escape from Gebhr, then the journey which they took after Linde's death to Lake Basso-Narok and on to where they were now stopping. "We have gone through so much, and suffered so much," he said to himself. "How often it seemed to

¹ For further information regarding the arid plains in these regions see the excellent book, "*Kili Mandjaro*," by Father Le Roy, now Bishop of Gabun.

498 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

me that everything had collapsed and I could find no way out of my difficulties; yet God helped me, and I always found a way out. It is quite impossible that after having gone so far and been through so many dangers we should give out on this last journey. We still have a little water, and this place is certainly not the Sahara, for if it were the people would surely have known it!"

But he was especially elated by the fact that during the day he had seen through the telescope indistinct outlines, as of mountains, lying toward the south. To reach them would mean a journey of perhaps a hundred miles; but if they only could reach them they would be saved, for mountains are rarely without water. How much time that would require he was unable to tell, for it depended on the height of the mountain. In air so transparent as in Africa high summits can be seen a considerable distance away, so water must be found nearer by. Otherwise destruction threatened them.

"It *must* be done!" Stasch repeated to himself.

The hard breathing of the elephant, who was trying his best to blow the fiery heat out of his lungs, continually interrupted the thoughts of the boy. But after a while it seemed to him as if he heard a voice like some one groaning, which sounded as though it came from another part of the camp; in fact, from where the water-

bags lay covered up for the night with grass. As the groaning continued, he arose and went to see what was the matter. The night was so bright that in the distance he could see two dark bodies lying side by side and the barrels of the guns glistening in the moonlight.

"The negroes are all alike!" he thought. "They should be guarding this water, which is now more precious to us than anything else in the world, and both of them are sleeping as soundly as if in their own huts. Ah! Kali's bamboo will be of some use to-morrow!"

With these thoughts he approached nearer and kicked one of the guards, but immediately drew back horrified—for the apparently sleeping negro lay on his back with a knife thrust up to the hilt in his throat, and beside him lay the other man with his throat so terribly cut that his head was nearly severed from his body.

Two bags of water had disappeared—three lay in the middle of the uprooted grass slit open and shriveled.

Stasch's hair stood on end.

CHAPTER XXIV

AT HIS cries Kali came running up, and after him the two men who were to relieve the guards, and then all the Wa-himas and Sam-burus assembled, howling and roaring around the place where the crime had been committed. The greatest noise and confusion ensued, the

500 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

underlying keynote being one of fear. The negroes were not so much disturbed on account of the men having been murdered and a crime committed as they were at having lost their last drop of water, now absorbed by the parched earth of the jungle. Several threw themselves on the ground and pulled up lumps of earth with their fingers and sucked out the remaining moisture. Others cried that wicked spirits had killed the guards and slit the bags. But Stasch and Kali knew how much credit to give to these tales. M'Kunji and M'Pua were missing from the howling throng. More than the murder of two guards and the theft of water had taken place. The water-bags left behind, having been torn, proved that it was done for revenge; it meant death for the whole caravan. The priests of the wicked Msimu had taken revenge on the good Msimu. The sorcerers had taken revenge on the young king because he had brought their deceptions to light and had not permitted them to continue deceiving the stupid Wa-himas. But now death hovered over the caravan like a hawk over a flock of doves.

Kali remembered, when it was too late, that he had been so sad and also so busy that he had forgotten to have the sorcerers bound, as he had done every evening since their attempt to escape. It was also evident that the two negroes guarding the water had lain down and gone to sleep, with the inherent thoughtlessness

of their race. This had made the work of the villains easy and permitted them to escape unpunished.

Quite a time elapsed before the excitement subsided and the party recovered from its dismay. The evil-doers could not as yet have gotten far away, for the ground under the slit bags was damp and the blood of the murdered guards was not quite dry. Stasch ordered the fugitives to be pursued, not with the sole purpose of punishing them, but also to recover the last two water-bags. Kali immediately mounted a horse and with several riflemen started in pursuit. It occurred to Stasch, who had first thought of accompanying them, that because of the excitement and the disturbed state of the negroes he could not possibly leave Nell alone with them; so he remained behind, but he ordered Kali to take Saba with him.

He was greatly afraid there would be an uprising, and he felt sure that the Samburus would revolt. But in this he was mistaken. Negroes are given to revolt, and sometimes even for trivial reasons, but when overpowered by misfortune, and especially when the merciless hand of death weighs heavily on them, they yield without making any attempt at resistance. This applies not only to those whom Islam has taught that it is useless to struggle against fate, but to all without exception. Then neither fear nor the agony of their last mo-

502 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

ments can awaken them from their lethargy. This was the case now. As soon as the first excitement was over and the Wa-himas and the Samburus realized that they must eventually die, they lay down quietly on the ground to wait for death; therefore no rebellion was to be expected; on the contrary, it was doubtful if they would get up the following morning and be willing to continue the journey.

Stasch felt deeply sorry for them.

Kali returned before daybreak, and immediately placed in front of Stasch two torn bags, in which not a drop of water remained.

"Great Man," he said, "Madi, apana!"

Stasch wiped his forehead, which was streaming with perspiration from fright and worry; then he asked:

"And M'Kunji and M'Pua?"

"M'Kunji and M'Pua are dead," answered Kali.

"You have killed them?"

"Lion or wobo killed them!"

And he began to relate what had happened. They found the corpses of the two criminals at quite a distance from the camp, where they had been killed. They lay side by side; both had had their skulls crushed in from behind, their shoulders torn, and their backs eaten. Kali conjectured that a wobo or a lion had appeared before them in the moonlight and that they had fallen on their faces to beseech it to spare their lives. But the terrible beast had killed

them both; then, having satisfied its appetite, it scented the water and tore the bags to pieces.

"God has punished them," said Stasch, "and the Wa-himas will now be convinced that the wicked Msimu can save no one."

And Kali repeated:

"God has punished them, but we have no water."

"Ahead of us, far off toward the east, I have seen mountains. There must be water there."

"Kali has also seen them, but to get to them are many, many days——"

A short silence ensued.

"Sir," said Kali, "good Msimu, Bibi, should pray to the Great Spirit for rain or for a stream of water."

Stasch made no reply, but moved away. He saw Nell's little white figure in front of the tent, for the screams and howls of the negroes had awakened her some time before.

"Stasch, what has happened?" she asked, hurrying toward him.

He laid his hand on her little head and said gravely:

"Nell, pray to God for water—or we are all doomed to die!"

And so the little girl raised her small, pale face to heaven; fixing her eyes on the silver disk of the moon, she prayed for deliverance to Him who in heaven guides the stars, and on earth tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.

504 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

After a sleepless, noisy, and distracted night the sun appeared on the horizon with the suddenness that prevails only at the equator; at once it was bright daylight. Not a drop of dew on the grass, not a cloud in the sky.

Stasch ordered the riflemen to gather the negroes together, and he addressed a few words to them. He explained that it was impossible to return to the river, for they knew full well that they were five days' or five nights' journey from it. But, on the other hand, no one could tell whether they might not find water in the opposite direction. In their immediate neighborhood a spring, a tiny stream, or a pool might be found; for although no trees could be seen, it often happens that on open plains where seeds are blown away by hurricanes there is water, though no trees. The day before they had seen several large antelope and ostriches running eastward, which was a sign that there must be a watering-place somewhere in that direction. Therefore any one not a fool or chicken-hearted, but having a brave heart like the lion and buffalo, would prefer to march on, even though suffering tortures from thirst, rather than to remain lying on the ground waiting for the hawks and hyenas to devour them. At these words he pointed with his hand to some hawks flying in circles over the caravan, the harbingers of disaster. Nearly all the Wahimas, whom Kali had ordered to arise, stood up when they heard these words; being accus-

tomed to despotic rule, they did not dare to show the least resistance. Many of the Sam-burus, however, because their king Faru had remained behind at the lake, did not want to get up again, and they said to one another: "Why should we seek death when death is seeking us?"

Thus the caravan, now reduced by nearly one-half, broke camp, and even this exertion caused the men much torture and pain. For twenty-four hours no one had tasted a drop of water or any other liquid. Even in a cooler climate this would have caused most acute suffering, and what must it mean to these—now laboring in this African furnace, in which, even if water be drunk in plenty, the perspiration follows so rapidly that one can wipe it off his skin almost the same moment it is swallowed. It was certain that many of the party would collapse by the way from exhaustion and sunstroke. Stasch protected Nell from the sun as best he could, and would not allow her for a second to put her head out of the palanquin, the roof of which, by the way, he had covered with a piece of white percale to make it a double protection against the blighting rays. He used the water still remaining in the rubber bag to make some strong tea and served it to her without sugar, because sweets increase thirst. The girl pleaded with tears in her eyes for him to drink, too, and at last he put the bottle, in which scarcely a few thimblefuls

of water remained, to his lips, and moving his throat, pretended to drink. At the same moment, as he felt the touch of moisture on his lips, it seemed to him as though a flame were burning in his chest and stomach, and that if he could not extinguish it he would drop dead. Red circles began to glimmer before his eyes, terrible stinging pains shot through his jaw as of a thousand needles. His hand trembled so that he came near spilling the last precious drops, but he only moistened his tongue and reserved the rest for Nell.

Another day of suffering and fatigue ensued, which was fortunately followed by a cool night. The next morning the burning heat again beat down and not a breath of air was stirring. The sun, like a spirit of evil, devastated the parched soil with its deadly fire. The edge of the sky down near the horizon was a pale hue, and as far as the eye could reach not even a bush could be seen. Nothing—only a burned, desert plain, covered with tufts of blackened grass and heather. Occasionally a slight rumble of thunder was heard in the far distance, but coming from a clear sky it was a sign of drought, not of rain.

At noon, when the heat was at its worst, it became necessary to halt. The caravan rested in gloomy silence. Two horses had dropped down, and a number of negroes had fallen behind. During this rest no one thought about eating. The eyes of all were sunken, their lips

cracked, and on them were dried clots of blood. Nell gasped like a languid little bird, so Stasch handed her two rubber-bags; and crying out, "I have drunk, I have drunk!" ran toward the other side of the camp, fearing that if he remained he would take the water away from her or ask her to share it with him. Perhaps this was the most heroic thing he had done during the entire journey. His sufferings increased under these tortures. Red circles continually glimmered before his eyes. Such a terrible pressure was in his jaws that he could open and shut them only with difficulty. His throat was parched and feverishly hot, there was no saliva in his mouth, and his tongue was dry as wood.

But this was only the beginning of the torture for him and for the caravan. The rumbling of thunder near the horizon, a sign of drought, continued. About three o'clock, when the sun turned toward the western side of the heavens, Stasch ordered the caravan to march. He placed himself at its head and led it toward the east. He had now scarcely seventy men, and now and then one of these would lie down beside his burden never to rise again. The thermometer went down a few degrees, but even then it was murderously hot. The motionless air was filled with suffocating humidity, and they could scarcely breathe. The animals also suffered. Saba's sides heaved up and down, and he panted laboriously; not a

drop of froth fell from his tongue, which was black and hanging out of his mouth. King, who was used to the dry African jungle, did not seem to suffer much, but still he began to be troublesome. A strange light shone in his tiny eyes. He still answered Stasch, and especially Nell, who occasionally talked to him, with a grunt, but when Kali thoughtlessly passed him by King snorted threateningly and waved his trunk so frantically that the boy would probably have been killed had he not sprung quickly aside.

Kali's eyes were bloodshot, the veins of his throat were swollen, and his lips were cracked like those of the other negroes. Toward five o'clock he approached Stasch, and with great difficulty moved his throat sufficiently to say in a hollow voice:

"Great Man, Kali can go no farther. He will stay here for the night."

Stasch controlled the pain in his jaw and answered with difficulty:

"All right; let us halt. The night will bring relief."

"It will bring death," whispered the young negro. The negroes threw down the burdens, but they did not lie down immediately, as the fever, which had thickened their blood, was now at its height. Their hearts and the pulses in hands and feet beat so heavily that it seemed they must burst. The skin on their bodies, dry and shriveled, began to itch. In their bones

they felt an intense restlessness, and a fiery heat seemed to consume their throats and intestines. Many walked restlessly up and down between the piles of baggage. By the rays of the dying sun, others, farther away, could be seen, following each other among the parched bushes until their strength was utterly exhausted. Then one by one they fell to the ground, not resting quietly, but twitching more spasmodically than before. Kali sat down, in Turkish fashion, next to Stasch and Nell, with his mouth open and gasping for air. Between breaths he begged beseechingly:

“Bwana Kubwa, water!”

Stasch looked at him with a glassy stare and was silent.

“Bwana Kubwa, water!”

And after a while:

“Kali die——”

Therefore Mea, who for some reason was able to bear the thirst better than any one else, sat down beside him, and putting her arms around his neck, said in a soft, melodious voice:

“Mea will die along with Kali——”

A long pause ensued.

Meanwhile the sun went down and the night clothed the landscape in darkness. The heavens became dark blue. In the southern sky shone the cross. Over the plain glittered myriads of stars. The moon rose and its light pervaded the darkness, and in the west the pale

twilight of the zodiac spread far and wide. The atmosphere became a huge glittering flood. An even more brilliant glow spread over the landscape. The palanquin, which they forgot to remove from King's back, and the tents shone as if made of white marble. The world sank into deathlike silence; sleep enveloped the earth. And in the midst of nature's tranquil peacefulness Stasch and his followers writhed in pain, waiting for death. On the silver background of the twilight the huge form of the elephant stood out distinctly. The moonlight illuminated the tent, Stasch's and Nell's white clothes, the spaces between the bushes of heather, the dark, cramped, and distorted bodies of the negroes and the baggage-strewn ground. Saba sat on his hind legs in front of the children and howled sadly with head turned toward the moon. Not a thought was left in the soul of Stasch—nothing but dumb despair. He felt there was no help, no way out, that all their terrible fatigue and hardships, all the sufferings and courageous deeds done on the terrible journey—from Medinet to Khartum, from Khartum to Fashoda, from Fashoda to the unknown lake—had been utterly useless, and that they could not escape the inexorable end of the struggle—death. It appeared all the more dreadful to him since it would come on the last stretch of the journey—at whose end lay the ocean. Oh, he could never take Nell to the coast, nor put her on the ship for

Port Said; he could never give her back to her father, nor fall into his father's arms and hear him say that he had acted like a brave boy and a true Pole! It was all over! In a few days the sun would shine but on lifeless bodies; then it would dry them up like the mummies that sleep the everlasting sleep in Egyptian museums!

His brain was turning from the pain and heat and fever; he saw visions of death struggles, and there came to him strange sounds. He distinctly heard the voices of the Sudanese and the Bedouins crying, "Yalla! Yalla!" as they mercilessly whipped their frightened camels. He saw Idris and Gebhr. The Mahdi smiled at him with his thick lips and asked: "Will you drink of the fountain of truth?" A lion standing on a rock gazed at him, then Linde gave him a jar of quinine and said: "Make haste, for the little one is dying!" Then he only saw a pale, sweet little face and two little hands stretched toward him.

Suddenly he shuddered; for a moment consciousness came back to him—close to his ear Nell's soft, sad, pleading voice whispered:

"Stasch—water!"

She, as did Kali, rested her hope on him. But as he had given her the last drops of water twelve hours before, he now controlled himself and cried out with a voice full of emotion, pain, and despair:

"Oh, Nell, I only pretended to drink! For

512 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

the last three days I have not tasted a drop!"

And holding his head in despair, he ran away that he might not see how she suffered. Blindly up and down between the tufts of grass and heather he ran, until his strength was utterly exhausted and he sank down on one of the bushes. No weapon of any kind was in his hand. A leopard, lion, or even a large hyena would have found him easy prey. But only Saba came running up, sniffing at him and howling, as if he, too, were asking for help.

No one came to their assistance. Only the calm, indifferent moon looked down upon them from above. For a long time the boy lay as if lifeless. When a cooler breath of wind, unexpectedly blowing from the east, restored him to his senses, he raised himself and tried to stand and go to Nell.

Now there blew another cool breath of wind. Saba ceased to howl, turned toward the east, and began to expand his nostrils. Suddenly he barked once in a sharp bass tone and then a second time, and ran on straight ahead. For a time he seemed to be silent, but soon his bark was heard in the distance. Stasch stood up, and staggering about on his benumbed legs, looked in the direction taken by Saba. The lengthy journeys, the long sojourn in the jungle, the necessity of keeping all his senses strung up to their highest pitch, and the incessant dangers he had encountered had taught

the boy to observe everything that was going on about him. And so, notwithstanding the tortures he suffered at the moment, and though he was only semi-conscious, he began from instinct to note the movements of the dog. After a while Saba returned, but he seemed disturbed and very restless. Several times he looked up at Stasch, walked around him, ran away in the heather sniffing and barking, and again returned, and at last taking hold of the boy's clothes, he began to drag him toward the opposite side of the camp.

Stasch had now fully regained his presence of mind.

"What is that?" he thought. "Either the dog has gone mad from thirst or he has scented water. But no!— If there were water near by he would have run there to drink and his throat would be wet. But if the water be far off he has not scented it—for water has no scent. He is not pulling me toward some kind of prey, for this evening he refused to eat. Then what can it mean?"

And suddenly his heart began to beat faster in his breast.

"Perhaps the wind has brought him the scent of human beings?— Perhaps—perhaps there is a negro village in the distance?—perhaps one of the kites— O merciful Jesus! O Jesus!——"

A faint ray of hope spurred him on; he felt stronger and tried to run toward the camp, in

spite of the resistance of the dog, who continually barred the way. From the camp Nell's white form shone out and her weak voice reached him; soon afterward he stumbled over Kali lying on the ground, but he took no heed of anything. Reaching the piece of baggage in which the rockets were kept, he tore it open, took one out, with trembling hands bound it to a bamboo post, pushed it into the earth, and lighted the fuse.

Soon a red snake shot up, spluttering noisily into the air. Stasch caught hold of the bamboo rod with both hands to prevent himself from falling, and gazed fixedly into the distance. The pulses in his hands and temples beat hard and his lips moved in fervent prayer. He felt that in this his last breath his heart was calling on Heaven for help.

A second, a third, a fourth minute elapsed. Nothing—and again nothing! The boy's hands fell at his side, his head sank to the ground, and dreadful pain filled his tortured breast.

"In vain! In vain!" he moaned. "I shall go and sit down by Nell, and we shall die together."

At the same moment far, far off in the silvery background of the moonlit night a fiery streak rose into the air and broke into golden stars, which slowly fell to the ground like large tears.

"We are saved!" cried Stasch.

Then the people, half dead but a moment ago, sprang up, running to and fro, jumping over the grass and tufts of heather. After the first rocket, a second and a third were sent up. Then a gust of wind brought the echo of a peculiar cracking sound, very evidently caused by distant shots. In reply Stasch ordered all the rifles fired off, and from that time the guns answered each other without intermission, and the noises became more and more distinct. The boy now mounted a horse, which also had—as if by a miracle—regained some strength, and holding Nell before him, galloped over the plain toward the sound of deliverance. Saba ran alongside, and behind him tramped the huge King. The two camps were several kilometers apart, but each party was hurrying toward the other, and so the ride was not a long one. The flashes from the guns could now be seen. Another rocket, the last, arose in the air, at a distance of not more than several hundred feet away. Then numerous lights shone. A slight swell of the ground hid them for a while, but when Stasch mounted it he found himself face to face with a line of negroes holding burning torches in their hands.

At the head of the line marched two Europeans wearing English helmets and carrying guns.

At a glance Stasch recognized Captain Glen and Dr. Clary.

CHAPTER XXV

THE expedition of Captain Glen and Dr. Clary certainly was not organized to seek Stasch and Nell. It was a large and well-equipped government expedition, sent out to explore the northeast slopes of the giant mountain Kilima-Njaro, and also the but little known large tracts to the north of this mountain. It is true that the Captain and the Doctor knew about the kidnapping of the children from Medinet el-Fayoum, for English and Arabic newspapers had published accounts of it, but they thought that both had died or else were languishing as prisoners of the Mahdi, from whom not a single European captive had regained his freedom. Clary, whose sister was married to Rawlison of Bombay, and who on his trip to Cairo had been quite taken with little Nell, missed her very much. But they were also very sorry for the brave boy. They had sent several telegrams from Mombasa to Mr. Rawlison asking whether the children had been found, and only after the last unfavorable answer, which arrived some time before the departure of the caravan, did they finally give up every hope of finding them.

It never even occurred to them that the children, who were kidnapped in distant Khartum, might turn up in this district. But in the evenings, after the day's work was over, they often

conversed about them, for the doctor could not forget the beautiful little girl.

Meanwhile the caravan advanced still farther. After staying quite some time on the eastern slopes of Kilima-Njaro and exploring the upper course of the rivers Sabaki and Tana, as well as the Kenia Mountains, the captain and the doctor turned off northward, and after having crossed the swampy Guasso-Nygro, came into a wide, uninhabited plain, over which roamed only innumerable herds of antelope. After a journey of more than three months, the people needed a longer rest, and so Captain Glen, after having come to a fairly large lake containing plenty of brown but healthy water, ordered the tents to be erected on its banks for a ten days' halt.

During the preparations for camping the white people busied themselves with hunting and sorting their geographical and natural science notes, and the negroes fell into their well-beloved idleness. It happened one day that Dr. Clary, rising early, and approaching the shore, saw several Zanzibar negroes belonging to the caravan with their faces upturned looking at the top of a tall tree and repeating over and over again:

"Ndege? Akuna ndege! Ndege?"—"A bird? No bird! A bird?"

The doctor was shortsighted, so he sent to the tent for a telescope; then he looked through it at the object to which the ne-

518 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

groes pointed, and great surprise showed on his face:

"Call the captain here!" he said.

Before the negroes had reached him the captain appeared outside the tent; he was about to start on an antelope hunt.

"Glen, look!" cried the doctor, pointing upward.

The captain raised his head, covered his eyes with his hands, and showed as much surprise as did the doctor.

"A kite!" he cried.

"Yes; but negroes don't send up kites! Where can it come from?"

"There may be a settlement of white people or a mission in the neighborhood——"

"This is the third day the wind has blown from the west, over a region as unknown and perhaps as uninhabited as is this jungle. Besides, you know that there are no settlements or missions hereabouts."

"Indeed, it is very strange and interesting."

"We must certainly take down the kite."

"Yes. Perhaps then we shall find out where it came from."

The captain gave a short order. The tree was several feet high, but in a moment the negroes had reached the top, carefully unfastened the kite, taken it down, and handed it to the doctor, who examined it quickly and said:

"There's writing on it—let us look!"

And in order to see better he half closed his eyes and began to read:

Suddenly his face changed and his hand trembled.

"Glen," he said, "take that; read it through, and convince me that I have not had a sun-stroke, and that I am still in my right senses!"

The captain took the bamboo frame to which the sheet of paper was attached and read the following:

"Nell Rawlison and Stanislaus Tarkowski, who were sent from Khartum to Fashoda, and were transported from Fashoda to the east of the Nile, have freed themselves from the hands of the Dervishes. After a journey of many months they have arrived at a lake which lies to the south of Abyssinia. They are going to the ocean. They beg for help."

And on the other side of the sheet was found the following postscript:

"This, the fifty-fifth kite, was sent up from a group of mountains which surrounds a lake not mentioned in geography. Whoever finds it should send the news to the canal administration in Port Said, or to Captain Glen in Mombasa."

STANISLAUS TARKOWSKI.

When the captain's voice had ceased the two friends silently regarded each other.

"What does it mean?" at last asked Dr. Clary.

"I can't believe my eyes!" answered the captain.

"But is there no mistake?"

"No."

"There it is, plainly written: 'Nell Rawlison and Stanislaus Tarkowski.'"

"There it is as plain as can be——"

"And perhaps they may be in this vicinity?"

"So God has apparently saved them."

"All thanks be to Him!" cried the doctor enthusiastically.

"But in what direction shall we look for them?"

"Is there nothing more on the kite?"

"There were several other words, but on a part torn by the branches; it is hard to read them."

Both leaned their heads over the paper, and only after a lengthy examination were they able to spell:

"The rainy season has long since passed."

"What does that mean?" asked the doctor.

"That the boy has lost his reckoning of time."

"And in this way he tried to give the date as best he could."

"You are right. So this kite can not have been sent up such a very long while ago."

"If that is the case, then they can not be very far off by this time."

This feverish, abrupt conversation lasted a little longer; then they both began to inspect the document again and to consider every word written on it. But it all seemed so improbable, that had it not come from a place where not even one European could be found—more than six hundred kilometers distant from the nearest coast—the doctor and the captain would have been inclined to think it a joke

played by European or mission children after having read in the newspapers about the kidnapping. Still it was hard for them not to believe their eyes; for they had the kite in their hands, and the inscription, being scarcely blurred at all, was quite distinct.

Notwithstanding, there were many things about it that they could not understand. Where could the children have procured the paper for the kites? If they had obtained it from a caravan, they would have joined the caravan, and so would not have been obliged to ask for assistance. Why had the boy not tried to escape to Abyssinia with his little companion? Why had the Dervishes sent them to the east of the Nile in an unknown country? How had they been able to escape from the Dervishes? Where were they hiding? By what miracle had they not starved to death during this journey of many months? By what miracle had they not become the prey of wild beasts? Why had the savages not killed them? To all these questions they could find no answers.

"I can't understand it. I can't understand it!" repeated Dr. Clary. "It surely is a miracle of God's working."

"It would seem so!" answered the captain.

Then he added:

"But there's a fine boy for you! This must be his work!"

522 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"And he did not leave the little one in the lurch. God bless his head and his heart."

"Stanley—yes, even Stanley—placed as he was, could not have kept up over three days."

"And they are still alive!"

"But they beg for help. What's past is past. We must depart immediately."

And so they set out. On the way the two friends continually re-examined the document, trusting that they might find directions on it to guide them in going to the children's assistance. But no such directions were found. The captain led the caravan in a zigzag path, hoping he might find some trace of them—the remains of some campfire or a tree with marks cut into the bark. In this way they traveled on for several days, when unfortunately they found themselves on a treeless plain, covered with tall heather and tufts of dried grass. The two travelers were now very much alarmed. How easy, they thought, was it to miss even a large caravan on these vast prairies and how much easier it was to miss two children, who, as they supposed, were creeping along somewhere in the tall heather like two little worms. Another day passed. Neither the tin cans with notes inside them which they left behind them tied to bushes, nor the watch-fires burning during the night were of any avail. The captain and the doctor from time to time began to lose hope of ever finding the children; indeed, they felt quite sure they were no longer alive.

Nevertheless, they continued searching diligently for several days. At last the scouts whom Glen sent out to reconnoiter brought news that in front of them lay an absolutely arid desert; so when they accidentally came across water in a hollow of the ground they were obliged to halt to make provision for the coming journey.

The hollow was several feet deep and very narrow. At its bottom a hot spring bubbled and boiled, for it was saturated with carbonic gas. The water when cooled proved to be good and wholesome. There was so much water in the spring that thirty men of their caravan were unable to empty it. On the contrary, the more water they dipped out the higher it spurted forth.

"Perhaps in time," said Dr. Clary, "invalids will come here to be cured by this water, but at present the steep side of the cliff renders it inaccessible even to animals. Can it be possible that the children have found a similar spring?"

"I don't know. Perhaps there are more like these in this part of the country. If not, the children will surely die of thirst."

The night approached. They lighted several fires, but no boma was erected, for they could find no materials with which to build it.

After supper the doctor and the captain sat down on camp-stools, lighted their pipes, and

began to converse on the subject that weighed most heavily on their hearts.

"Not the least trace!" Clary began.

"It had occurred to me," answered Glen, "to send ten of our people to the coast with a telegram, stating that news from the children had been received. But I am glad that I did not send it, for the messengers would most likely have given out on the way, and even if they had reached their destination, what good would it do to raise false hopes——"

"And increase their grief——"

The doctor removed his white helmet and wiped his perspiring forehead. "Listen," said he. "Suppose we were to return to that lake, and have niches cut in the bark of the trees and large fires burning by night! Perhaps the children would see these signs."

"If they are in the neighborhood we would not need to take these means to find them, and if they are far away the rise in the ground would hide the fires. This plateau only appears to be level; in reality it is covered with ridges and waves like the ocean. Besides, if we were to retrace our steps we would lose all hope of finding a vestige of them."

"Speak plainly. You have lost all hope?"

"My friend, we are grown, strong, experienced men; just imagine what would have become of us if we had been stranded here by ourselves, even if supplied with water, had we no provisions or men!"

"Yes, unfortunately—yes, I can picture to myself two children traveling through the desert on a night like this——"

"Hunger, thirst, and wild animals——"

"And yet the boy writes that they have dragged through long months in this way."

"I can not possibly imagine it."

For a long time all that disturbed the silence of the night was the crackling of the tobacco in their pipes. The doctor stared into the pale depth of the night, and then in a suppressed voice said:

"It is now late; but I can not sleep. And to think that, if they are still alive, perhaps they are wandering around here somewhere in the moonlight between these dried tufts of heather—alone—such young children! Glen, do you remember the angel face of the little one?"

"I remember it perfectly, and shall not forget it."

"Ah, I would gladly have my hand cut off if——"

He did not finish the sentence, for Captain Glen jumped up as suddenly as if scalding water had been poured over him.

"A rocket in the distance!" he cried. "A rocket!"

"A rocket!" repeated the doctor.

"There must be a caravan ahead of us."

"Perhaps it has come across the children!"

"Perhaps. Let us make haste to meet them."

"Forward!"

The captain's orders were at once heard throughout the camp. The Zanzibar negroes sprang to their feet. Torches were lighted, and in answer to the distant signals Glen ordered rockets sent up in rapid succession and shots to be fired.

In less than a quarter of an hour the entire camp was on its way.

From a distance were heard shots responding to theirs. There was no longer any doubt but that some European caravan was for some unknown reason asking for help.

The captain and the doctor ran as fast as they possibly could, alternately hoping and fearing. Would they find the children or not? The doctor said to himself that if they did not find them they could at least search for their bodies in the dreadful heather-fields.

Half an hour later one of those ridges of which they had spoken shut off the view from the two friends. But they were now so near that they distinctly heard the tramping of horses. A few minutes more and a rider appeared on the top of a hillock; he held a large white object in front of him on the saddle.

"Hold the torches high!" commanded Glen.

At the same moment the rider brought his horse to a standstill within the circle of lights.

"Water! Water!"

"The children!" cried Dr. Clary.

"Water!" repeated Stasch.

And he almost threw Nell into the arms of the captain and then he sprang out of the saddle. The next moment he staggered to the ground as if lifeless.

The rejoicing of the rescuers was boundless, but the credulity of the two Englishmen was put to a severe test, as they had been unable to comprehend how the children by themselves had been able to travel over the measureless tracts of land and the deserts which separated their present position from the Nile and Fashoda; neither could they conjecture how "the young Pole," as they called Stasch, could have done it, and how it was that he appeared before them as the leader of a large caravan—armed with European weapons—with an elephant who carried a palanquin, with horses, tents, and a considerable amount of provisions. At this astounding sight the captain stretched out his hands, saying over and over again: "Clary, I have seen a great deal in my life, but never a boy like this," and the good doctor, equally astonished, said:

"And he released the little one from captivity—and saved her!" After having made this remark, he ran to the tents to see how the children were and if they were sleeping comfortably.

After they had had food and drink, the children were undressed and put to bed, and slept during the whole of the following day as

soundly as if they were dead, and so did the men belonging to their caravan. Captain Glen attempted to question Kali about their adventures and about Stasch's part in them, but the young negro merely opened one eye and answered: "The Great Man can do everything," and went to sleep again. So they were obliged to put off their questions until the following day.

Meanwhile the two friends consulted with each other as to the journey back to Mombasa. They had already traveled farther and explored larger tracts than their commission called for, and so they decided to return at once. The unknown lake had a great fascination for the captain, but the welfare of the children and the desire to take them back to their grief-stricken fathers as soon as possible turned the scales. The doctor insisted that at present they should take a good rest on the cool summits of the Kenia or Kilima-Njaro Mountains. They also decided not to send word to the children's fathers until they reached the mountains, and then tell them to come to Mombasa.

On the third day, after they were well rested and had bathed several times, they started on their return journey. Now they were obliged to part from Kali. Stasch convinced the little one that it would be selfish for her to take him with them to the ocean, or even as far as Egypt, for even in England Kali would be nothing



“Water! Water!” repeated Stasch.”

“The children!” cried Dr. Clary.”

—PAGE 526.

more than a servant, while if he were to rule over his people he could, as king, spread the Christian religion and ameliorate the savage customs of the Wa-himas, and not only civilize them, but make them good. He also expressed similar sentiments to Kali. Many tears were shed at parting. Stasch was not ashamed to weep, for had not he and Nell been through much happiness and misery in common with Kali? And not only had they both learned to appreciate his kind heart, but they had also grown very fond of him. The young negro lay a long time at the feet of his Bwana Kubwa and of the "good Msimu." He turned back twice to look at them, but at last the moment of parting had come, and the two caravans separated, going in opposite directions.

It was only after they were under way that the adventures of the two little travelers were told. Stasch, who used to be so fond of boasting, did not sound his own praises at all now, for he had accomplished so many things and gone through so much that he had developed sufficiently to recognize that facts speak louder than words—that deeds alone, even when told as modestly as possible, speak for themselves. Daily, during the hot "white hours," and evenings in the bivouac, the events and adventures which the children had suffered passed before the eyes of the captain and the doctor like moving pictures. In this way they saw them car-

ried off from Medinet-el-Fayoum, and the terrible journey on camels through the desert—Khartum and Omdurman, which was a hell on earth—and the designing Mahdi. When Stasch told how he had replied to the Mahdi when the latter wanted him to change his religion, the two friends arose and each of them in turn grasped Stasch's right hand firmly. Then the captain said:

"The Mahdi is not living now!"

"The Mahdi not living now!" repeated Stasch, surprised.

"That's true," the doctor continued. "He was suffocated in his own fat, or, properly speaking, he died of fatty degeneration of the heart, and Abdullah¹ has taken command."

A long pause ensued.

"Ha!" said Stasch. "When he sent us to meet our death in Fashoda he had no idea that death would overtake him first."

And after a while he added:

"But Abdullah is even more cruel than the Mahdi."

"And that has led to the present revolts and slaughter," answered the captain, "and the whole structure of government which the Mahdi erected is bound to fall sooner or later."

"And what will happen then?"

"England," answered the captain.

¹ Abdullah's reign lasted ten years longer. The fatal stroke was given to the Dervishes by Lord Kitchener, who, in a bloody battle, nearly annihilated them, and rased the tomb of the Mahdi to the ground.

During the rest of the journey Stasch told them about the trip to Fashoda, about the death of old Dinah, their departure from Fashoda, their journey to uninhabited districts, and their search for Smain. When he came to the part where he had killed the lion and then Gebhr and Chamis and the two Bedouins, the captain interrupted him, exclaiming, "All right!" and once more grasping his right hand. He and Clary continued to listen with increasing interest about the taming of King, their dwelling in "Cracow," Nell's fever, the finding of Linde, and the kites, which the children sent up from the Karamajo Mountains. The doctor, who grew fonder of little Nell day by day, was so especially interested in all that had threatened to harm her that from time to time he had to strengthen himself with a drop of brandy, and when Stasch began to relate how she had nearly become the prey of the terrible wobo he took the little girl in his arms, and would not let her go for some time, as if afraid that some new beast of prey might threaten her life.

What he and the captain thought of Stasch was expressed in two telegrams which they sent off two weeks later (after they had reached the foot of Kilima-Njaro) by messengers, who had orders to forward as soon as possible to the two fathers.

The first telegram was carefully worded and sent to Port Said. It was as follows:

532 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

"Thanks to the boy, have good news of the children. Come to Mombasa."

The second was more explicit and addressed to Aden. It read:

"The children are safe in our hands. The boy a hero!"

They made a halt of two weeks on the cool summits of Kilima-Njaro, for Dr. Clary urged this on account of the health of Nell and of Stasch. The children adored this sky-high mountain, which possessed every kind of climate imaginable. Its two peaks, Kibo and Mawenzi, were usually clothed in thick mists during the day, but when the mists suddenly lifted on clear evenings the everlasting snows on the summit of Mawenzi shone with a rosy glow, reflected from the sunset, while all the rest of the world was already wrapped in darkness—the mountain resembled a shining altar of God. At this sight the children unconsciously folded their hands in prayer.

For Stasch the days of worry, anxiety, and trouble were over. They now had a journey of a month before reaching Mombasa, and the road lay through the beautiful but unhealthy Tawet forest. How much easier was it now to travel over well-known roads with a numerous and well-equipped caravan than to wander around in an unknown wilderness accompanied by Kali and Mea. Besides, Captain Glen now

took charge of the journey. Stasch recovered and went hunting. Having found a chisel and hammer among the tools of the caravan, he set to work during the cool hours to chisel on a large gneiss rock the following inscription: "Poland is not lost yet!" for he wished to leave at least a trace of their sojourn in this country. The Englishmen, to whom he translated the inscription, were surprised that the boy had not thought of perpetuating his own name by carving it on a rock in Africa. But he preferred the sentiments he had chiseled on it.

He continued to protect Nell, and this gave her such an unlimited confidence in him that when Dr. Clary asked her whether she was not afraid of the storms on the Red Sea, the girl rested her beautiful soft eyes on him and replied, "Stasch will know what to do!" Captain Glen said that no one could have given a truer and more beautiful proof of what Stasch was to the little one or given him higher praise.

Although the first telegram sent to Mr. Tarkowski at Port Said was very carefully worded, it produced such a great effect on Nell's father that he nearly died of joy, and Mr. Tarkowski, although an unusually demonstrative man, knelt down to pray and besought God that this news might not be another false clue or the result of a diseased imagination brought about by their own longing and their grief. For had

584 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

they not both done everything trying to ascertain if their children were still alive? Mr. Rawlison had led caravans to the Sudan, and Mr. Tarkowski, dressed as an Arab, had gone as far as Khartum, thereby greatly endangering his life. Nothing had been of any avail. Those who might have given them some news had died from smallpox or from hunger or had been killed in the bloody fights that were continually being waged, and there seemed no more trace of the children than if they had fallen into the water and disappeared. At last both fathers gave up all hope and only lived on remembrances, firmly convinced that there was nothing in life for them, and that death alone would reunite them to their loved ones, who were everything to them. When this great joy suddenly came to them it was almost more than they could bear; nevertheless, it was accompanied by uncertainty and surprise. Neither of them could comprehend how and in what manner the news of the children had come from this part of Africa; that is to say, from Mom-basa. Mr. Tarkowski imagined that an Arab caravan, advancing from the eastern coast after having been in the interior hunting for ivory, had reached the Nile and had either bought their freedom or had stolen them. The words of the telegram, "thanks to the boy," they accounted for in the following manner: They conjectured that Stasch must have written to the captain and the doctor and told them

where he and Nell were to be found. But there were many things which it was impossible to explain. On the other hand, Mr. Tarkowski clearly saw that this was not only *good* news, but *very* good news, for otherwise the captain and the doctor would not have dared to arouse their hopes, and besides, they would not have told them to come to Mombasa.

The preparations for the journey were soon made, and on the second day after receiving the telegrams both engineers, with Nell's governess, boarded a large steamer of the Peninsula and Orient Company, which was on its way to India, and stopped en route at Aden, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. In Aden a second telegram awaited them, which read: "The children are safe in our care. The boy a hero!" After he had read it Mr. Rawlison, nearly beside himself, continually repeated as he grasped Mr. Tarkowski's hand:

"You see—he saved her—I owe her life to him——" and Mr. Tarkowski repressed his feelings, so as not to appear weak, compressed his lips, and answered: "Yes, the boy has been brave," and entering his cabin, he wept for joy.

At last the moment came when the children threw themselves into the arms of their fathers. Mr. Rawlison took his regained treasure in his arms, and Mr. Tarkowski held his heroic boy pressed to his heart in a long embrace. Their calamities had passed by as hurricanes

and storms pass over the desert. Life was once more filled with sunlight and happiness, their longing and separation even increasing their present rejoicing. But the children were greatly surprised that their fathers' hair had become quite white during the separation.

They returned to Suez on a French boat of the Messageries Maritimes, which was crowded with passengers from the islands of Réunion, Mauritius, and from Madagascar, and Zanzibar. When the news that there were children on board who had been taken captive by the Dervishes and escaped had become known, Stasch was made the center of general curiosity and admiration. But the happy quartet preferred to shut themselves up in the large cabin, which the captain had given up to them, and pass the cool hours relating their adventures. Nell also took part, chattering like a little bird, and to the great amusement of everybody she commenced every sentence with "and." Resting on her father's knees and raising her lovely eyes to him, she talked somewhat like this: "And, papa, dear! And they carried us off and led us on camels—and Gebhr beat me—and Stasch protected me—and we arrived in Khartum—and there people died of hunger—and Stasch worked, so as to get dates for me—and we were with the Mahdi—and Stasch would not change his religion—and the Mahdi

sent us to Fashoda—and then Stasch killed a lion and all—and we lived in a large tree called “Cracow”—and King was with us—and I had the fever—and Stasch cured me—and he killed a wobo—and conquered the Samburus—and—papa, dear—he was always very good to me——”

She also spoke of Kali, Mea, King, Saba, Linde and his mountain, and of the kite sent up just previous to meeting the captain and the doctor. Mr. Rawlison could with difficulty suppress his tears during this chatter, pressed his child more closely to his heart; and Mr. Tarkowski was so overcome with pride that he could not control himself, for even from this childish talk it could readily be seen that had it not been for the ability and energy of the boy the little one would have been hopelessly lost, not only once, but many times.

Stasch gave an exact account of everything, and while telling of the journey from Fashoda to the waterfall, a great load fell from his chest, for when he told how he had shot Gebhr and his followers, he stopped and looked uneasily at his father—but Mr. Tarkowski frowned, thought a while, and then said gravely:

“Listen, Stasch! One ought never kill any one, but if any one threaten your country, or the life of your mother or sister, or the life of a woman placed in your care, then unquestionably shoot him, and without any

qualms of conscience—and never feel any remorse.”

On arriving at Port Said Mr. Rawlison and Nell went to England, where they took up their residence. Stasch's father sent him to a school in Alexandria, for there his deeds and adventures were not so well known. The children wrote to each other almost every day, but it so happened that they did not see each other for ten years. After the boy had completed his studies in Egypt he attended the Polytechnic School in Zürich, and on receiving his diploma engaged in tunnel work in Switzerland.

It was ten years later, when Mr. Tarkowski retired, that they both visited their friends in England. Mr. Rawlison invited them to spend the entire summer at his house near Hampton Court. Nell had passed her eighteenth birthday, and had grown up a lovely girl, blooming like a rose; and Stasch found, at the cost of his peace of mind, that a man of twenty-four is not too young to think of the ladies. In fact, he thought so continually of the beautiful and well-beloved Nell that he felt like running off wherever his eyes would lead him and his feet would carry him.

But one day Mr. Rawlison, laying both his hands on the young man's shoulders, looked into his eyes and said:

“Stasch, tell me. Is there any one in the

world but you to whom I could trust her so well?"

The young Tarkowski couple remained in England till the death of Mr. Rawlison. A year later they started on a long journey. They had promised themselves the pleasure of revisiting the places where they had spent their childhood and had wandered as youngsters, so they first went to Egypt. The kingdom of the Mahdi and Abdullah had long since disintegrated, and after its ruin there came, as Captain Glen had said, "England." A railroad had been built from Cairo to Khartum. The places which used to be overflowed by the Nile had been cleaned up, so that the young couple were able to travel in a comfortable steamer not only as far as Fashoda, but even to the large Victoria-Nyanza Lake. From the town of Florence, which lay on the banks of this lake, they took the train to Mombasa. Captain Glen and Dr. Clary had moved to Natal, but under the good care of the English officials in Mombasa lived—King. The giant immediately recognized his former masters, and he welcomed Nell with such joyous trumpeting that the neighboring mangrove trees shook as though before a wind. He also knew old Saba, who had lived to almost twice the age allotted to dogs, and, though half blind now, accompanied Stasch and Nell wherever they went.

Stasch also learned while there that Kali was

540 *THROUGH THE DESERT*

doing well, that he ruled under English protection over the whole territory south of Rudolf Lake, and that he had invited missionaries to come into his land to preach Christianity among the savage natives.

After completing this final long journey the young couple returned to Europe, and taking Stasch's father with them, they made their permanent residence in Poland.

**THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA CRUZ**

This book is due on the last DATE stamped below.

50m-6,'67(H2523s8)2878

Size
pue to

PG7158.S4W212



3 2106 00161 0978



